Nº 15

ARKEN SWORD

50P

IAN GIBSON

EDITORIAL

Aiming High:That's what I'm doing now.

Throughout the past 5½ years that I've been doing this little zine, I've always tried to improve & upgrade the quality of the contents and printing. That includes covering a wide range of topics. I want every sort of comic strip covered, not just superheroes. There are excellent strips being created by the Independents and the Small Press that deserve just as much attention as the produce of the Big 2. I want to print the work of people who are good, but haven't been picked up by the professionals. There are a lot of famous comic creators I want to interview too. I want to do a lot of things.

What have I done so far? Well, I've raised the page count for the fourth consecutive issue, while maintaining the cover price. I've managed to get quite a few interviews. Some quite good ones too. The print-run has increased quite rapidly. There are now more shops and dealers taking it. There's a chance of distribution to the good old U.S. of A. I've sold out of issues 10-14, so I'm now thinking of reprints in the future. I'm also thinking of putting out a 100-page issue of Arken Sword in the future. This is something Martin Skidmore of Fantasy Advertiser got me hooked on. Martin is aiming for the same thing with FA. I'll try for it during 1986.

Next issue has Ron Smith, artist on Judge Dredd and hundreds of other strips, talking about his 36 years in the business. Ron has generously offered a cover.

I hope you enjoy this issue's art, articles, and interviews,

BEST WISHES,
Paul

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ARKEN SWORD 15 is 50p (70p by post) from Paul Duncan. 5-issue subscription is £3, and you get free things with that as well. Issues 8 & 9 are still available.(£1 for both.)

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This issue was printed by Vincent Press, Unit 1a, Lansil Industrial Estate, Caton Road, Lancaster, Lancashire. Why not phone John and ask him for a quote?

If anyone wants a chat I'll be at the Comic Art Con in London and at the Glasgow Con advertised in this issue. I don't bite, often.

ANGEL and the APE

"Halos (sic) and bananas!" DC's resident Inquiring Fanatic exclaimed. "HALOS AND BANANAS!! Wherever you looked - halos and bananas! You remember the ads! They were plastered all over the DC books...'Who are they? What are they? Angel and the Ape!' And then the full-page silhouette ad showing the miniskirted miss and the big, hulking, hairy guy who looked like an ape. Having already seen The Creeper and Hawk & Dove, naturally I knew what the strip was about...A sister and brother team of superheroes whose hang-up was that the girl believed in peace and non-violence, and the guy, whose costume was one big crazy red sheepskin, believed in guerilla tactics. It was so obvious! And I was SO wrong..."

And wrong he was. Angel O'Day and Sam Simeon were actually one of the most unlikely crimebusting duos in the history of comics. Angel was a glamorous, miniskirted private detective with an office in one of the seedier quarters of New York City. And Sam was an ape. A highly sensitive, refined, intelligent ape, to be sure. But an ape just the same. He helped Angel in her ceaseless war against crime, and worked on the side as a comic book artist for the oddly-named Brain-Pix Comicals, Inc. "Between drawing pictures and saving Angel, I never get any rest," he once grumbled.

Angel and the Ape made their first appearance in Showcase 77, Sept. '68. They proved reasonably popular with DC's loyal readership and were soon awarded their own title, the first issue of which appeared on the newsstands only a couple of months later. It contained a booklength yarn called 'The Case of the Missing GO-GO Girls' - 23 pages of fast-paced action and 'Laugh-In' style humour (the kind of thing our American cousins refer to as 'sophomoric'.)

Subsequent issues followed much the same pattern - a blend of frenetic plotting, wisecracking dialogue and juvenile sight-gags. The situations were wildly improbable; the villains largely bereft of superpowers. The accent was on FUN, pure and simple.

The scripts were by diverse hands, notably Sergio Aragones of MAD fame. They were visualised by dependable Bob Oksner, one of the mainstream comic book genre's finest 'good girl' artists (he could give Dan De Carlo a run for his money any day of the week.) Several issues were inked by the great Wally Wood, who imparted a sophisticated veneer to Oksner's pencils. Angel O'Day never looked more gorgeous. Even today, after an interim of 17 years, such Oksner/Wood collaborations as 'The Most Fantastic Robbery in History' and 'Remember the Chow Mein' remain as fresh and diverting as ever.

Sam Simeon's career as a comic book artist may be of interest to contempory fans, particularly in view of the fact that the publishing company for which he worked, Brain-Pix Comicals, Inc.,was transparently based on the Marvel 'House of Ideas'. The Brain-Pix offices were a kind of creative mad-house ruled by scheming, conniving, weasel-like Stan Bragg.

Stan Bragg was a character out of a DC editor's nightmare. He bore a close physical resemblance to Roy Thomas but behaved more like Stan Lee gone berzerk. Whenever Sam delivered a fresh batch of artwork to the Brain-Pix offices, Stan would immediately set his seal on it. His favourite trick was to strike any reference to Sam from the credits. He would then substitute his own name in block capitals - example:

> "Shimis - Queen of the Jungle by ~~SAM SIMEON~~ STAN BRAGG
> Stunning story by Stupendous Stan Bragg
> Superior drawing by Snappy Stan Bragg
> Special lettering by Spectacular Stan Bragg
> Straight borders by Shaky Stan Bragg
> Sensational colouring by Colourful Stan Bragg
> A Sincere Production, hopefully presented for your perusal and entertainment by humble STAN BRAGG..."

This was Stan Lee as seen by his DC rivals : a rampant egomaniac who shamelessly exploited the creativity of others.

To today's readers this kind of needling may seem petty and ill-considered, but at the time it was par for the course. Many DC staffers were deeply resentful of their Marvel counterparts. They regarded Stan the Man and his bullpen consortium as upstarts - flagrant claim-jumpers with no right to their new-found success. It was only natural, therefore, that they should strike back with the most convenient weapon at their disposal : satire.

The supreme irony here is that although Stan Bragg was conceived as a grotesque parody of Stan Lee's 60's persona, he was actually a very premonitory

figure. Over the past 17 years Stan Lee has sunk deeper and deeper into the mire of self-parody, finally becoming the tiresome old windbag he is today. He has, in effect, metamorphosised into Stan Bragg.

Sam Simeon eventually grew tired of Stan Bragg's obnoxious high jinks and shifted his allegiance to Brain-Pix' number one rival, DZ Comics. He immediately hit it off with high-ranking DZ editor Morton I Stoops, who bore a suspicious resemblence to a certain DC editor. All of which proves that the DC people weren't above a little self-parody when the occasion called for it. At the very least their attempts at humour were far more palatable than the material found in Marvel's crass Not Brand Ecchh. Take it from one who knows...

Angel and the Ape was very much a product of the go-go 60s, the era of napalm and Nehru jackets. 'Anything goes' was the order of the day. 'If it feels good-DO IT!' The comic book industry was wide open for any concept, the more far out the better. Angel and the Ape must have seemed like a good idea when it was first suggested - a sure-fire winner. With the advantage of hindsight, however, we can see that it was really just a novelty title with no real long-time potential. As soon as the first sales figures came in, Sam and Angel had the rug pulled out from under them. They disappeared into comicbook limbo andhaven't been seen or heard from since. In all the excitement of the period their passing went largely unnoticed - but shed no tears for them. Angel O'Day and Sam Simeon may never have attained superstar status, but their career was fun while it lasted. Besides which it's perhaps just as well that they went under when they did. If he were still around today, Sam Simeon would be drawing jerk-off 'graphic novels' for the direct sales market. And that's no way for any self-respecting artist to finish up.●

Pete 'cheap shot' Scott

RATMAN in The Trial of THE CRIMSON CRUSHER

by BAM

SPIKEY SHARPE, AKA THE CRIMSON CRUSHER, YOU ARE CHARGED WITH ROBBERY, ASSAULT, RESISTING ARREST, JAY WALKING, DISTURBING THE PEACE, LITTERRING, LOITERRING AND LOOTING, DEMOLISHING WITHOUT A LICENSE AND BEING A DEADLY WEAPON. HOW DO YOU PLEAD?

NOT GUILTY.

NOT GUILTY MY MOUSTACHE! AND I'LL SAY SO AS PUBLISHER AND EDITOR OF THE DAILY TRUMPET!

I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE RATMAN TESTIFY!

THAT NO GOOD *!●☆@ RATMAN!

HEY WAKE UP COMMISH.

KUH? BOOK 'IM DANNO! LET'S ROLL! LET'S DO IT TO THEM BEFORE THEY DO IT - OH!

SPIKEY SHARPE DO YOU SWEAR TO TELL THE TRUTH THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH?

I SURE DO.

THE DEFENCE MAY PROCEED.

NOW JUST RELAX SPIKEY, I WANT YOU TO TELL US HOW YOU BECAME THE CRIMSON CRUSHER.

START FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD.

GEE I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN REMEMBER MUCH OF MY CHILDHOOD, I WAS PRETTY YOUNG AT THE TIME.

I REMEMBER I WAS A BIG CLUMSY KID, GUESS I DIDN'T KNOW MY OWN STRENGTH.

A Tale by Spike

I REMEMBER MUM SENDING ME TO CLASSES I HATED LIKE BALLET AND PAINTING.

SEEMED LIKE WHEN SHE WASN'T SHOUTING AT ME THE OTHER KIDS WERE LAUGHING AT ME!

WHAT A MAROON!

CLUMSY CLOT!

YOU'RE USELESS!

BIG BABOON!

BUT WHEN I JOINED THE WILDCATS THEN EVERYONE STOPPED LAUGHING. THE WILDCATS DIDN'T MIND WHEN I BROKE THINGS THEY LIKED IT!

PRETTY SOON AFTER THAT I LEFT HOME.

I JOINED A BIG ORGANISATION AND WAS INVOLVED IN CEMENT AND GARBAGE DISPOSAL.

SOON I WAS CHOSEN TO WEAR THIS NUTTY ARMOUR AND BE CALLED THE CRIMSON CRUSHER.

THEY ACTUALLY CHOSE ME, THEY WANTED ME. SO AFTER THAT I DID WHATEVER THEY TOLD ME TO.

THANK YOU SPIKEY. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY MY CLIENT HAD A DIFFICULT CHILDHOOD WHICH LEFT HIM OPEN TO MANIPULATION BY UNSCRUPULOUS MOBSTERS!

YOUR WITNESS MR. D.A.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY BROTHERS OR SISTERS CRUSHER?

A: YEAH I GOT TWO BROTHERS.

Q: HAVE EITHER OF THEM BECOME VICIOUS, EVIL CRIMINALS DUE TO YOUR LOVING MOTHER'S SELFLESS CARE AND DEVOTION?

A: WELL JOEY'S AN ACCOUNTANT, HE MARRIED JENNY AND THEY GOT A LITTLE BOY NOW CALLED JIMMY. MY OTHER BROTHER BOBBY'S IN INSURANCE, HE AIN'T MARRIED BUT HE'S BEEN GOING STEADY WITH –

YES THANK YOU CRUSHER.

NOW HERE WE SEE A PICTURE OF THE CRIMSON CRUSHER! DOES THIS LOOK LIKE SOMEONE WHO WOULD DO JUST AS HE WAS TOLD?

OR DOES IT LOOK LIKE A PICTURE OF A RUTHLESS EVIL AND VIOLENT MAN? THIS MAN RIGHT HERE!

RATMAN WOULD YOU PLEASE TELL THE COURT OF YOUR DEALINGS WITH THE CRIMSON CRUSHER.
SURE THING.
'I'D BEEN ON HIS TRAIL FOR ABOUT A WEEK WHEN WE FINALLY MET IN AN OLD ABANDONED WAREHOUSE.'
'WE HAD A BIT OF A DUST UP BUT I MANAGED TO SUBDUE HIM AND CALLED IN THE MUKTROPOLIS POLICE DEPARTMENT.
YOUR HONOUR I OBJECT TO THE RELIABILITY OF THIS WITNESS'!
HOW CAN WE TAKE SERIOUSLY THE WORD OF SOMEONE WHO PARADES AROUND IN SUCH A RIDICULOUS COSTUME?
OBJECTION OVERULED.
YOU HAVE HEARD THE CASES PUT FORWARD BY BOTH THE DEFENCE AND PROSECUTION. WILL THE JURY NOW RETIRE AND REACH A VERDICT OF GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY.
GUILTY AS SIN!
SPIKEY NEEDS HELP NOT PRISON.
SURE AND I'M GLAD I DON'T HAVE TO MAKE THE DECISION.
THE LAW IS THE LAW NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST CRUSHER MUST PAY FOR THE CRIMES OF THE PRESENT.
I WISH HE'D SMASHED RATMAN WHEN HE HAD THE CHANCE!
IF ONLY I COULD HAVE BEEN THERE TO HELP CRUSHER WHEN HE NEEDED IT, THEN THIS WOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED. BUT IS IT TOO LATE FOR HIM TO CHANGE EVEN IF HE IS GIVEN THE CHANCE?
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MY CHANCES?
NOT GOOD I'M AFRAID.
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO FIGHT MY WAY OUT OF TROUBLE BUT NOT THIS TIME.
THREE HOURS LATER.
HAVE YOU REACHED A VERDICT?
WE HAVE.
DO YOU FIND THE DEFENDANT SPIKEY SHARPE GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?
GUILTY.
IF CRUSHER'S THE ONE WHO'S BEEN FOUND GUILTY WHY AM I THE ONE WHO FEELS IT?
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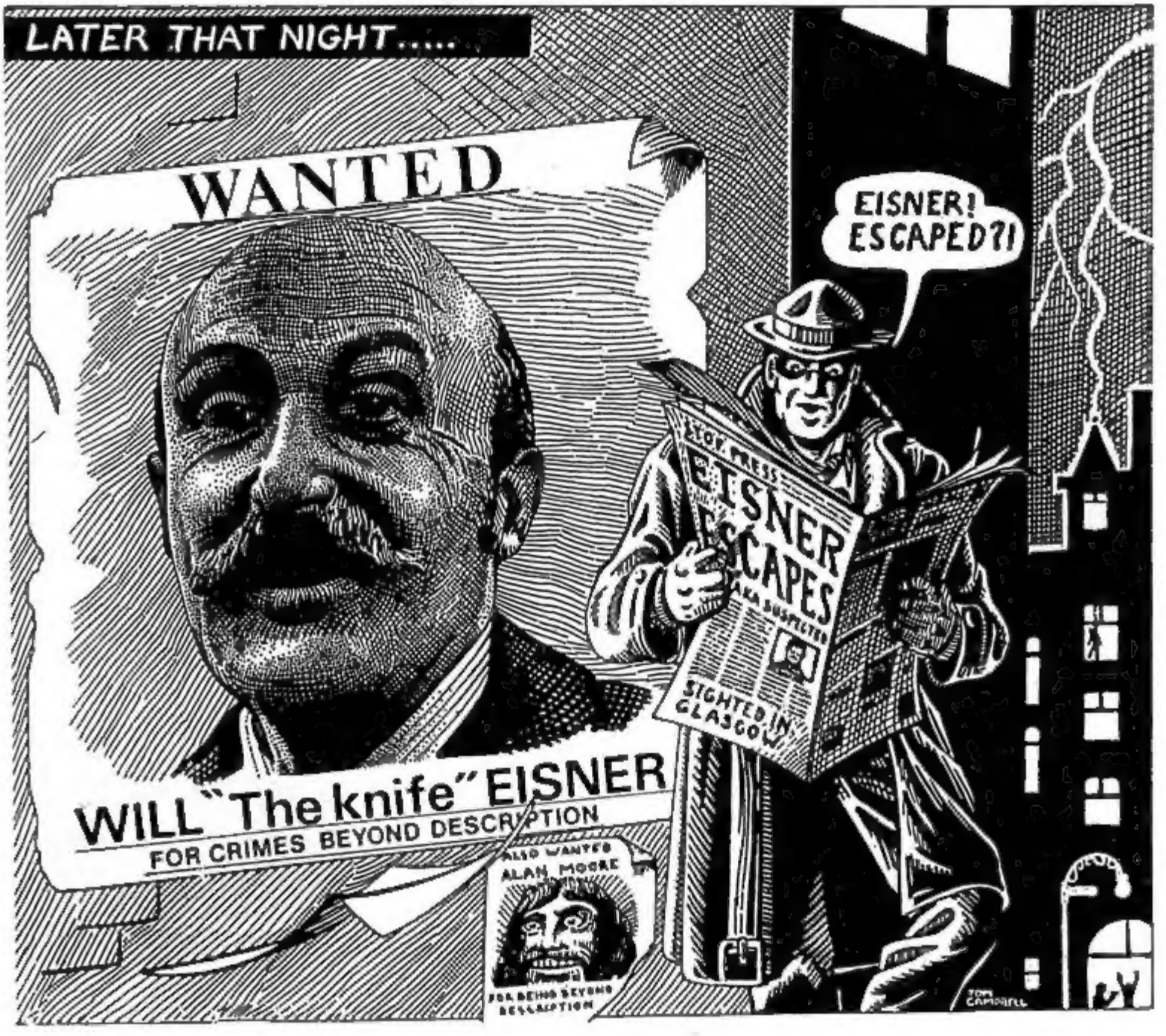

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SUMMER Nº 1

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48 PAGES - 8 STORIES

BRITAIN'S NEWEST TALENT

BRITAIN'S NEWEST COMIC

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AN INTERVIEW WITH IAN

GIBSON.

For the past 6 years Ian Gibson has worked on some of the best material in 2000AD. His Judge Dredd work is instantly memorable. Robohunter has varied in quality, but the latest story, Farewell, My Billions, contains some of Ian's finest art to date. The Ballad of Halo Jones is a dense, intriging, and very well done SF story.(As well as being a personal favorite of mine.)

Ian's art is cartoony and loose. Deceptively so. The realistic styles of Brian Bolland, Neal Adams, or Al Williamson are not for him. Ian manipulates the reader. The effect is of realism, in a cartoon style.

This interview was conducted by John Jackson and me, via the post office and taps recorders, during the months of July and August. Ian was working on the latest Robohunter story.

Paul

What training did you have in art?

After grammar school I studied fine art at Birmingham Art College, but it's not really what I'd call a training in art because it was just a time to develop my interests and ego and take a lot of those famous substances that us student types used to take back in the heydays of flower power, running around barefoot with my hair down to my elbows.

I think, for comics, you need to train yourself because in this country, as far as I know, there's nowhere you can go to learn about comics. It's such a frowned-on media. Whereas fine art has got its own pomposity to it and very artificial standards. Comic art is looked down upon generally, I think very wrongly, so really I just had to spend my time developing the little character and talent that I've got.

I was very lucky because after college I went to work on computers for a year and that was quite a nicely paid job. In my final year of college I'd gotten interested in comics because I was sharing a flat with a Marvel fan. I saw some of his Marvel Thors and I thought "Wow, that's very psychodelic!" That was back in '67 or '68 and they impressed me so much I thought "This is very powerful stuff", so in my final year I drew a couple of comics, hand drawn and coloured, but same size as opposed to the way I work now which is half to twice up. People were coming up to me and saying that there, in about 6 by 8 inches I'd got more powerful images than anybody else had got on 10 by 4 foot canvas'. I was in the habit of doing things the size of a wall.

So my comics interest developed into a study of comics at the end of my college career, but as I say I worked in computers for a year and a few months. Then I was lucky to come into a small inheritance, by todays standards, of £1000. That allowed me to take some time off and work on my own ideas. During that time I drew up my own story that I'd started at college, called The Incredulous Fink (Fink pronounced Think). Eventually the title became The Incredulous Fink Again. It was just a spoof on comics generally with a very silly hippy hero getting into all kinds of stupid situations. I got about 100 copies printed with a little of the money, and I sent them off to just about everybody. The Louver in Paris. The British Museum. Marvel. IPC. IPC didn't want to know. They thought it was rubbish. Marvel wrote back and put me in contact with some friends of Barry Smith, and they told me about a publication they were doing called Aspect and Orpheus. So I had to chase around to try and find that and it took me a long time to actually get in contact with those guys. I was living in Birmingham and nobody in Birmingham had ever heard of it. It turns out eventually that I was at college with a friend of Barry's who was, when I look back on it, actually showing us those original Aspect & Orpheus drawings he was doing. I think he was doing Industrial Design or something and I used to go to the Industrial Design Department occasionally and he'd shown me the stuff that Barry had done. I thought it was very Kirbyesque at the time...which it was. So from getting in contact with those guys I got encouraged to do my own stuff and they commissioned me to start.

But as I say, it wasn't training as such, it was something I had to develop for myself. By the way, those guys were Steve Parkhouse, who became a very, very good friend, and Chris Lowder.

What exactly was The Incredulous Fink about?

I'm not really sure what it was about. His first adventure was with, or rather against, The Indelible Blot, who attempted to take over the worlds communications systems but was defeated by Fink's clever effigys of himself sculted in blotting paper. Can you believe that?

Next he met the giant, gigantic, unmiticable Ursula and the cowardly Custard-Pie Man. Then he got swallowed by a giant Tyrannosaurous Rex, just about the time his wife arrived on the scene, dressed up as Doc Doom originally. I remember a picture of Doc Doom doing the washing-up in all his armour with this little cloth for drying the dishes. He looked really cute.

Episode 3 took place entirely in the monsters stomach, as did Episode 4, where Fink, his wife, & Custard-Pie Man met this rather bizarre stuntman who only gets walk-on parts because he's only a head and a hand. He couldn't really do anything else. More like hop-on parts.

Then I decided to make Fink serious and it turned into a novel. So I threw away all the silliness and, for want of a better word, kept the name Fink for my hero. I really need to look for something that people will take a little more seriously. It's an epic novel and to give you some idea of how big it is, it would take me 3 years to draw if I drew a page every day.

What artists have influenced you the most?
That's a big question. My early influences were the Americana like Gene Colan, Jack Kirby, John Buscema and Neal Adams, of course, who seems to be featured in just about everybodies list of influences. Then I was exposed to Spanish artists like Esteban Maroto, Antonio Hernandez Palacios, Victor de la Fuente, Jesus Redondo and Carlos Gimines, who is very,very good. Hal Foster, Al Williamson (Agent 19),Uderzo's Asterix, the original Modesty Blaise strips, and Frank Bellamy's work. I thought he was great. As a child I remember his Eagle work on Dan Dare, and his work on Garth was superb. Ron Embleton is another great artist who's historical books are gems gems, but I haven't got any of them unfortunately. Then people like Frazetta tend to knock me sideways. The feeling that he's got is absolutely great, whereas Boris Vallejo leaves me a bit cold because he's too static and staid. Everything's a bit too perfect, whereas Frazetta has got so much 'Umph' in his work. He leaves your imagination to work, and that's art. I like art to have mood and life and too much artistic perfection of detail comes over studied and wooden. I like feeling and that's where Frazetta comes off well. I love Victor de la Fuente because he's got such a strong sense of design. Each picture stands out on its own as a perfection of balance yet it blends perfectly into the page design and creates a harmonious feel. And it tells the story very vividly. He's a genius, and there aren't many of those about.
Your first professional work was in 1972 drawing Swedish love stories. How did this come about?
My first work was actually horror stories for the Swedish market. Pocket library stuff that was made and printed over here. I don't really know what happened to it. I only saw a couple of copies. It came about because the first job I ever tried was a love story for IPC but my style was too dramatic for girls adventure stuff, and the original pages also got lost in the post, so it was all a rather ill-fated attempt to get into IPC.

For a few months I worked as a stage roadie for the Climax Chicago Blues Band while my agent looked for something to suit me. Horror was the readiest available outlet. I did a few months of those 64 page books. One book a month, which I got paid £200 a book. That was back in '72,early '73.

Did you enjoy drawing them?
I loved it! I enjoy drawing full stop. It gave me lots of chances to experiment with images and ideas because horror stories contain all the elements of the other styles: pretty women, bizarre animals, drama, action, mood, horror. Lots of fun.
Howard Chaykin says that beginners have nowhere to learn nowadays and are being dropped straight into superhero comics. Do you think that doing all those horror and love stories was the best thing that ever happened to you?
Well, yes, but my agent is probably the best thing that ever happened to me because he's got me to do horror, love, adventure, cartoons, feature pages, and everything I've been offered, despite my protests that "it's not my bag, man." He got me to do work for my own education and development and that has tucked a lot of drawing miles under my belt. So now I can say I can try to draw anything. I've even done porno stuff.

So anywhere you start is a good start but maybe trying to go straight into all-out action is heavy going if you haven't learnt the basics. So I wouldn't advise anybody to try to get into comics unless they've learnt to draw. They need good draughtsmanship, a good sense of contrast , or colour, but above all you need a good sense of storytelling. You need to be a storyteller, and you need to want to communicate to people. You need to love your characters.
You wrote a love story for Starlet. Do you ever see yourself writing anymore of your own stripe?
Well, the Starlet stuff I wrote was more girls adventure than love stories as such, and yes, I've a whole bunch of ideas that are waiting for me to find the time to finish, or in some cases, to start. For example there's the Fink story that became the serious epic of 25 40 page episodes. And there's Axis, the warrior in time, as well as my favourite, a fairy story called Grain. That actually began as an entertainment among some friends one Christmas as we sat around rather stoned. A friend of mine was entertaining the children in all of us and I was doing drawings to illustrate it as he told it. That developed into a series of epic proportions again. Everything I start for myself seems to end up as an epic and I never have anything down to a publishable format.

So there's a lot of stuff I want to do for myself

but I've been so busy that I don't even get holidays never mind time to do my work.

Axis, Warrior in Time, is quite funny with lines like "Thrice cursed bitch, I'll slit that evil tongue of yours." I get the feeling that you'd just come from an overdose of Kirby Thors. What's the story behind Axis?

I like the idea of magic in stories. Axis was an attempt to put magic and barbarian adventure into one package. The script is very tongue-in-cheek because I don't take my script-writing very seriously. I haven't done enough of it to develop any great skill and gather any of the techniques that you see John Wagner using. My timing and pacing in scripts hasn't reached a point where I've developed enough awareness to want to put my stuff into production yet. I think I was aware of that at the time I was writing it, that it was more a script for somebody else to tidy up than as a final product.

For Grain,did you change the story to give it an Asterix feeling or did you see these ideas in your friends original storyline?

The original idea was just a fairy story to be done as an illustrated book, but once I'd done those initial character sketches I decided to try it out as a strip. From there the story grew and changed. Both Paul Kentley, the writer, and I were very fond of Asterix and we used to sit around giggling and laughing saying "Have you seen this bit?" and "Oh, doesn't that look fantastic?" We saw that our characters would enjoy being portrayed in that style and active humour. It wasn't so much a copy of Uderzo as a salute to the brilliance of Asterix. Also, there wasn't any original script, it was just an idea that we sat down and talked about. I formulated a plot and drew it up from that vague plot idea. Those are the pages that you have, which later underwent some more changes as the story developed, and they'll get changed again if I have the time.

Do you think that IPC won't take on a strip like Grain because they're scared of advances and taking chances?

IPC have always been scared of change. The only change they make is to kill off ideas in their infancy. There are many new projects we've offered, or various writers have offered up to the managing heads at IPC, with lots of preparation in artwork and scripts for dummy pages, and they're either killed or castrated on the drawing board usually.

Starlord was originally intended to be a glossy monthly, a high quality production. Then they killed it by making it a very rushed bi-weekly on cheaper paper.

There was supposed to be the idea of Judge Dredd having his own monthly magazine recently. And then there was going to be a Justice product, which may have been part of the Judge Dredd weekly that was going to have various things in it that I did some dummy work for, I think that's been killed off.

IPC don't seem to have any sense of adventure. They are definitely very nervous about the market.

The serious Fink strip looks as though you've drawn from real life or photos. Do you still do that today to get particular angles and poses?

Nowadays I rarely have the chance to use photographs for reference. In SF there aren't any references for what you need to draw. For the kind of action poses I like to work with, using photographs would make it look too stilted and wooden. So now all my figures are drawn from imagination. Occasionally I'll see a photograph with lighting on it that I like and I'll say 'I can use that lighting.' More often though I'll just bumble along formulating how light falls on faces myself, and that's why my faces look so strange, because the light is coming from every possible angle and usually it's totally incorrect.

Recently I went to the library for references and photos for the dolphins and rats from the Halo Jones story, but that's as close as I've got to using references recently.

Above:A page from Petra, a series for the Swedish magazine,Starlet.
Opposite:A doublepage spread from the original Incredulous Fink saga, before it became the almost-serious Fink, and then the deadly serious Fink.

What work did you do leading up to Judge Dredd in 2000AD?

In 1973/4 I did some horror illustrations for what was going to be called Scream for John Barraclough. That was for the Warner Publications people. Those were for text stories written by Chris Lowder and Steve Moore. ((These appeared in Target.)) Then Dez Skinn began his House of Hammer and I drew Kronos, Vampire Slayer for it. Then, while I was working with Blas Gallego (as a co-artist on girls papers, Sugar Jones and other innocuous girlie adventures) IPC wanted to do a special called Black Beth, about a voluptuous warrior maiden and her dwarf cohort. So we worked together on that, but along with so much of IPC's ideas it got permanently shelved.

For John Barraclough I did 2 complete Bionic Woman Annuals for 1977/8. Some of it was full colour, and it was a lot of fun That was just before I started on Judge Dredd.

Did you find the likeness of the Bionic Woman hard to capture with full colour?

I didn't find too much of a problem in drawing her because in colour the modelling of the features allows more detail in the face, so the challenge of getting a likeness was a lot of fun to do. The problem I found was that she had got absolutely no shape to her legs at all so I just ignored that and gave her the shape of legs I wanted.

I really did quite enjoy trying to get a good likeness of her, though I think very often I ended up making her prettier than she really is.

How did the Big Ben strip come about in the Marvelman Special? Warrior didn't exist when I did my Big Ben strip. I drew it originally for Warner Publications back in 1974, and I got paid a ridiculous amount, like £14 a page, and that was for colouring it as well. I wasn't told that it was to be used in Marvelman. In fact I thought that it had long since been buried in the archives It was originally drawn for a projected 'British Superheroes' comic for John Barraclough and Roger Cook before he moved into the world of tasteless porn.

The costume in its bizarre forms, clock arms, hovver brolly and all, was my design from Steve Moore's script.

Dez Skinn was cornered by John Jackson, to talk about Big Ben, and the following ensued.

In 1975 I was the managing editor of Williams AKA Thorpe & Porter AKA Topsellers, and I was editing Mad and House of Hammer and various other things.

At the time we felt we should have a British superhero comic called British Superhero, with 3 characters. 1 Superhero;1 ninja, and 1 Kung-Fu fighter, because that was the popular thing. I've still got all 3 strips but only the superhero, Big Ben, has appeared in print.

What made you bring it back after such a long time?

Partly out of economy,I'd got 14 pages of unused artwork, and partly because when we were starting Warrior we wanted a few of our own characters. Marvelman we aquired. Speedmaster was going to be another one ,for whom I did the Scalextric comic with Ian Kennedy. Big Ben was going to be yet another one. We were talking about having a team of characters and everything. We were all terribly naive and such, but as it developed Marvelman became so powerful it wouldn t have worked except as a springboard, so I asked Alan Moore if he would include Big Ben into the story So that's how he got into Warrior.

Who owns the rights!

Me

How do you work with William Simpson, who is the artist on Big Ben at present?

Over the telephone usually, because he lives in Northern Ireland. William's relatively fresh into the business, and David Hine is now inking his work because even though William is a dynamic artist he hasn't had enough practice at inking. I don't know how he gets the practice if I don't give it to him, but I obviously want to get the best end product possible. David Hine is a very weak penciller, but a really strong inker so, I thought, put the 2 together and you have a solid looking strip

Do you send finished scripts & so then discusses it over the phone?

Usually, unless we're running late, and then I just send a frame breakdown and script it according to the artwork. Usually I provide finished scripts so William has a better feel for what's supposed to be happening in that particular frame.

Does he make any changes to your scripts?

I don't mind if he does, but, no not a great deal. We have changed the total direction of the strip, as you may have noticed. This is very deliberate. A lot of things do link up.

The fantasy stories, the Avengers stories, were merely spoofs which we did to an extent because Warrior was getting too heavy. It needed something a little lighter. You appreciate V For Vendetta' more if there was something a bit more light-hearted next to it. If it was surrounded by dark, moody stuff it would detract from the mood of V.

So what are you doing now?

Trying to sell it to the Americans?

Well, here's a scoop. We're bringing out a 32 paged, full colour comic-book called The Liberators, and the back-up strip is called The Projectors. The Projectors are the children of the Project. The Project is the place that we've been featuring in Warrior where human children with latent psychic abilities are falling into the clutches of this alien called The Controller, who boosts their mental powers and then sends them off to his world to act as soldiers.They finally escape and remain on Earth with their boosted psychic abilities, and they become The Projectors.

Who's written this?

Me

Who's drawing it?

Me. No. William Simpson and David Hine are drawing that one, and John Ridgway is continuing to draw The Liberators. And The Liberators are, in fact, the descendants of The Projectors 35p (75 cents) on your news-stands every month.

Next issue will see an interview with Big Ben artist, William Simpson, and included in the piece will be pencils for some of the sample strips he's done, as well as a look back at some of his previous work. Believe me, they are worth seeing

If my luck holds out, there will be a mini-interview with Judge Dredd writer, John Wagner, next issue as well.

I don't know what's happening from one day to the next, but it works out well in the end

This selection of pictures from the original Big Ben strip shows him with Hover Brolley, Clock Arms, and white belt. All these were badly edited out when the strip was printed for the first time in the Marvelman Summer Special

I also did the disasterous Gemini Man Annual around '77. It was the TV series that was the disaster The annual was just the average budget production. I think I found the same problem as the TV people did it a very hard to make a story exciting when the character is not visible half the time

In 1975 I did some text illos for the Kung Fu Annual of 1976, while Paul Neary did the strip work for that one

I was doing Sugar Jones with Bliss Gallego for Mirabella, and love stories for Matoo I also did a lot of love stories for Sweden

What writers did you work with during the time for Oh Boy! and Matoo?

I believe dear old Mr. Wagner had a hand in some of those stories, especially as he wanted to do a series with me called Georgy Boy That never got off the ground because I never drew the samples that he wanted to present to the editors. It was a likelyled type story

I really didn't know who I was working with half the time

Did you have any language difficulties with the Swedish horror and love stories? Who wrote the stories and what [illegible]

The other artists were people like Redondo, Comos, Romero Not the Romero who does Axa but a relation), and other guys I can t remember A lot of the guys were copying Esteban Maroto I was really lucky because these Spanish guys like Redondo and Comos were brilliant, there's no denying that, while the other ones, the cheap copy artists who were getting into the market because they were cheaper than anyone else, spoilt the market for themselves. So when I come along the editors jared me because I was fresh and new and I had a different outlook I wasn't a straightforward Spanish romantic style. I was very different and vibrant and cute So the editor of Starlet, Mona Ryberg who I have to thank greatly, really got onto my work and started plying me with more and more work because she thought I was better than all the rest. There were absolutely no language problems at all because they did a moderate job of translating scripts for me. Eventually Mona was writing a lot of the stuff herself. It was really nice because while doing these little romantic stories, the romantic artists dream came true and Mona and I had a nice little affair I nearly went to live in Sweden, and we very nearly got married It was a very pleasant time doing these love stories.

And then for John Wagner I got to do some war story called Death Wish, for Valiant while he was editor of the same That led to me doing some feature stuff for the back page of some war comics, and I also did some weapon features for the very early issues of Battle I think that s where John first saw my work and decided to try me out as a war artist I then did a few issues of Death Wish Originally he just wanted me to do four to fill in for someone else but I ended up taking over the strip it seemed

Did you use much reference material on Death Wish and did having to keep [illegible] crayons and [illegible]

I've still got all the books I bought as reference for Death Wish and having to use the references can make things horribly slow, even though I got just about everything wrong anyway It was a real pain, to be honest, when you know some little kid is going to complain about every little nut and bolt on a tank being in the right place That s what the editors used to tell me anyway I didn t enjoy Death Wish at all I don t like drawing hardware In the latest Robohunter I've got to design these shuttlecraft I m absolutely useless at designing things like that I think the Mantis tank (from Judge Dredd) is the only decent piece of hardware I've ever designed I was really pleased to see that Cam Kennedy had done such a marvellous job portraying it in one of the Judge Dredds he did recently No made it really worthwhile I got a warm glow from seeing his interpretation of my Mantis tank.

Do you find todays war stories [illegible]

[illegible]

I must admit I haven t read any of them recently War stories generally are offensive I really hated Death

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Beige This is a page from the 'Contraception Information Pamphlet which was done for the racial integration people in Lambeth. The strip is entitled 'Don t Rush Me

WHY WORRY?
YOU'VE BEEN CRYING WHAT'S UP?
IT'S SOCIAL WORK LEST ME
OH NO WHAT HAPPENED?
HE WANTED US TO HAVE SEX BUT I WOULDN'T
THAT KIND ARE ALL THE SAME - THEY SLEEP AROUND AND THEN EXPECT TO MARRY WHOMEVER!
I THINK YOU WERE RIGHT, BUT A MAN DOESN'T RESPECT YOU IF YOU GIVE IN AND ANYWAY IT'S WRONG
YOUR PAIN BUT LISTEN!
OH NO HE SAYS YOU'VE MADE ANOTHER SPECIAL
BUT I DON'T WANT A BABY
YOUR MOTHER WOULD HELP YOU LOOK AFTER IT SHE'D SAY SHE WAS ANGRY BUT SHE'D BE PLEASED REALLY
HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU WANT TO MARRY A MAN UNTIL YOU'VE SLEPT WITH HIM ? BESIDES IT'S FUN AND DOES NO HARM
SHE WOULDN'T SHED THROW ME OUT AND ANYWAY THERE'S ONLY MUM AND DAD HERE AND THEY'RE BOTH AT WORK BESIDES I WANT TO GET AROUND A BIT FIRST
DON'T LISTEN TO DAVID - YOU MAKE UP YOUR OWN MIND BUT DON'T SAY YES OR NO JUST TO KEEP HIM AFRAID HE'LL LEAVE YOU - THAT'S BLACK MAGIC
I TOLD SAID EVERYTHING DONE IT
EVERYONE SAYS THEY DO IT BUT IF YOU DECIDE TO YOU MIGHT GET PREGNANT
I DON'T AND MY DAD THROW ME OUT WHEN I GOT PREGNANT
IT WAS TERRIBLE GROWING UP SHARON ON SOCIAL SECURITY IN A TINY DAMP ROOM IT WAS A WE LOVED HIMMED TILL SHE WENT TO SCHOOL

Above A page from "Mike a Saddest Love" which appeared in 'Oh Boy ' and featured Mike Holoway from the pop group,Flintlock,and TV series, The Tomorrow People Ian describes these stories as "pretty awful"

Wink and I only did it really as a favour to John Wagner anyway I kept moaning about it, and the editorial changes they made to my, perhaps over-adventurous layouts Generally I think war stories are a waste of time

In SF and war strips there is the dynamic aspect of the hat wars to latch onto. In romance stories, what is there to hold on to the artists after all?

The women There's girls, clothes, fashion, a mood to be created, the cleanness of the images demands a certain discipline, as does the need for the girls to be pretty and the boys to be handsome You may need a light and airy mood, or drama, or an aura of sadness. You have to conjure those moods and play with peoples emotions in the images you are projecting So there a hell of a lot to work with there They've all got to be projected in the artwork, not just in the words. The artwork has to live The words are just there to make the thing flow It needs a lot of thought I used to put a fair degree of thought into it Not as much as I should have maybe, But then again when I was working with Blas Gallego he always used to say 'This is toilet paper ' He'd be working along frantically producing another three pages a day saying This is toilet paper! This is toilet paper!'

I've changed my attitude now, and I no longer work on toilet paper Those were my bad days.

In Warrior and 2000AD there is an awareness of the older reader - the reader in his 20s and over - and some of the strips reflect this Why aren't there war and romance comics to cater for this older audience?

I don't think there would be a sufficently large audience for a discerning war or love story comic that can't be satisfied by the ingredients that are in general SF. I don't think you could find a war story to sell to an older reader. The same with love stories on their own You need another element with them. That's why SF is great because it can encompass war and romance within the framework of SF. So everybody's happy. I am, I know that.

...For a very short while I did a bionic link-up with the Six Million Dollar Man and the Bionic Woman for Look-In, but the scripts were so bad that I quit after 2 or 3 episodes. I just told them I wasn't willing to work with such crudy scripts, so they said 'Sod off

I did a special pamphlet on contraception for the West Indian Communities Relations department and that led to doing an anti-drink campaign for the under-age drink problem.

I've been offered some advertising work. One time an agency wanted me to do a page for the Royal Marine Commandos but on top of the fact that the agency were a bunch of assholes, my aversion to the concept made me turn down the job, even though the fee was ridiculous. They were offering me as much for one page as I normally get for a whole episode. Otherwise I'd probably be rich and living somewhere totally different now. I don't tend to get on well with advertising or music people now Their attitude to artists doesn t appeal to me.

Your artwork changed a lot from 1970 to 1971 and you developed a recognisable & tighter style. Were you consciously looking for a style that would suit you back then?

In the early 70s I worked on horror stories, which sadly I've got no references of because the few copies I did have I gave away to a friend who was the right hand man for the Maharishi at the time Then working on love stories next made me tighten up my images from the horrific to the pretty As you can imagine that's an extreme turnaround. This discipline probably helped me develop faster than I would have otherwise if I had just been left to drift along doing horror and SF and the things I wanted to indulge in

Also I was picking out my influences and deciding who I liked and what influences helped my knowledge Some of those influences I've totally discarded now.

The 2 sample pages you drew for IPC in 1971 both had female leading characters. One was fantasy and the other was a superhero one Did you do these to show IPC you were interested in doing more than just love stories? Did you feel restricted doing love stories when your heart was in SF?

At that time IPC didn t actually know me as a love story artist, because I was working mostly for Sweden The love story stuff I had done for IPC was done anonymously with Blas Gallego

to feeling restricted, that's quite ironic because my heart was very much in the love stories at the time. The ones I was doing for Sweden were being written by the lady I was spending as much of my time with as I could manage when I could get over to Sweden.

The sample pages were of females because IPC were intending to produce a dummy with some fantasy female character and I did both styles because I didn't have any specific brief from IPC. My agent just came to me and said IPC were looking for something with a female lead. The irony is that IPC rejected my pages yet I ended up doing the job anonymously with Dias Gallego. The story ended up being called Black Beth. Dias was commissioned to do the story but because I was drawing Sugar Jones and some other girls stories with him at the time, I also helped on some of the Black Beth stories as well, unknown to IPC. They shafted the project anyway, as usual.

You drew sample pages of Vampirella. Did you ever get any work from Warren?

I don't think my agent actually sent those pages to Warren so I never got any work from them.

How did you get the job of doing Judge Dredd?

From my agent showing Pat Mills and John Wagner some of the serious Fink pages. Because I'd worked with John on Death Wish it helped them to decide to offer me the Call-Me-Kenneth Dredd strip, which was the first I worked on, I was interested in SF so it seemed natural. Lewis, my agent, just came to me one day and said,'I've at last got a SF magazine - it's just up your street.' So he went rushing over there with my samples and as a result I got some Judge Dredd to do.

Judge Dredd has been around for a long time now and so the readership has changed a lot. Some of them have grown up, I'm sure, and you may have even grown with him. Are you any less constrained with him there for now than you were at the beginning?

At the beginning I was more adventurous with the supporting characters like Call-Me-Kenneth and his robots than with anything else. Sadly IPC decided to edit out my cuteness and humour. Things that they now expect they were editing out in those days. So Dredd has come round to be more of my kind of story, mainly because the humour of Sam Slade has changed the audience reaction. So the humour in Dredd is now played up a little more but my early days on Dredd were uncomfortable because of the editorial changes and messing about, which took the edge off my enjoyment. So now when I do Dredd I just coast along within Mike McMahon's shadow. He's defined the Dredd character and style and even Mega City itself. It's a Mike McMahon creation, regardless of the fact that Esquerra designed the costume. I think Esquerra's Dredd is a pale shadow of Mike's. I think Mike is the real genius behind Dredd. He's the one that's made it popular. I can't understand why people like Esquerra's work. I just don't like his work.

In the Eagle Talk of Judge Dredd 1 Nick Landau writes,"Ian, who never really left a mark on Dredd,decided it was time to move on..." Could you expand on this please?

I think you better ask Nick about it.

I enjoyed some of the Dredd stuff a lot, such as the Elvis story, and some of the stories on the moon were a lot of fun. I really was enjoying some of those Dredds before I moved onto Sam Slade but, as I say, my taste for humourising Dredd wasn't quite appreciated as much as it would be now maybe. So I was made to feel apprehensive about my artwork because of the editorial eagerness to change things around once I'd done them. I don't remember any specifics, but generally I wasn't as happy with Nick Landau as an editor as I could have been.

In one of the early stories Mutie the Pig was tortured to be Judge Gibson.

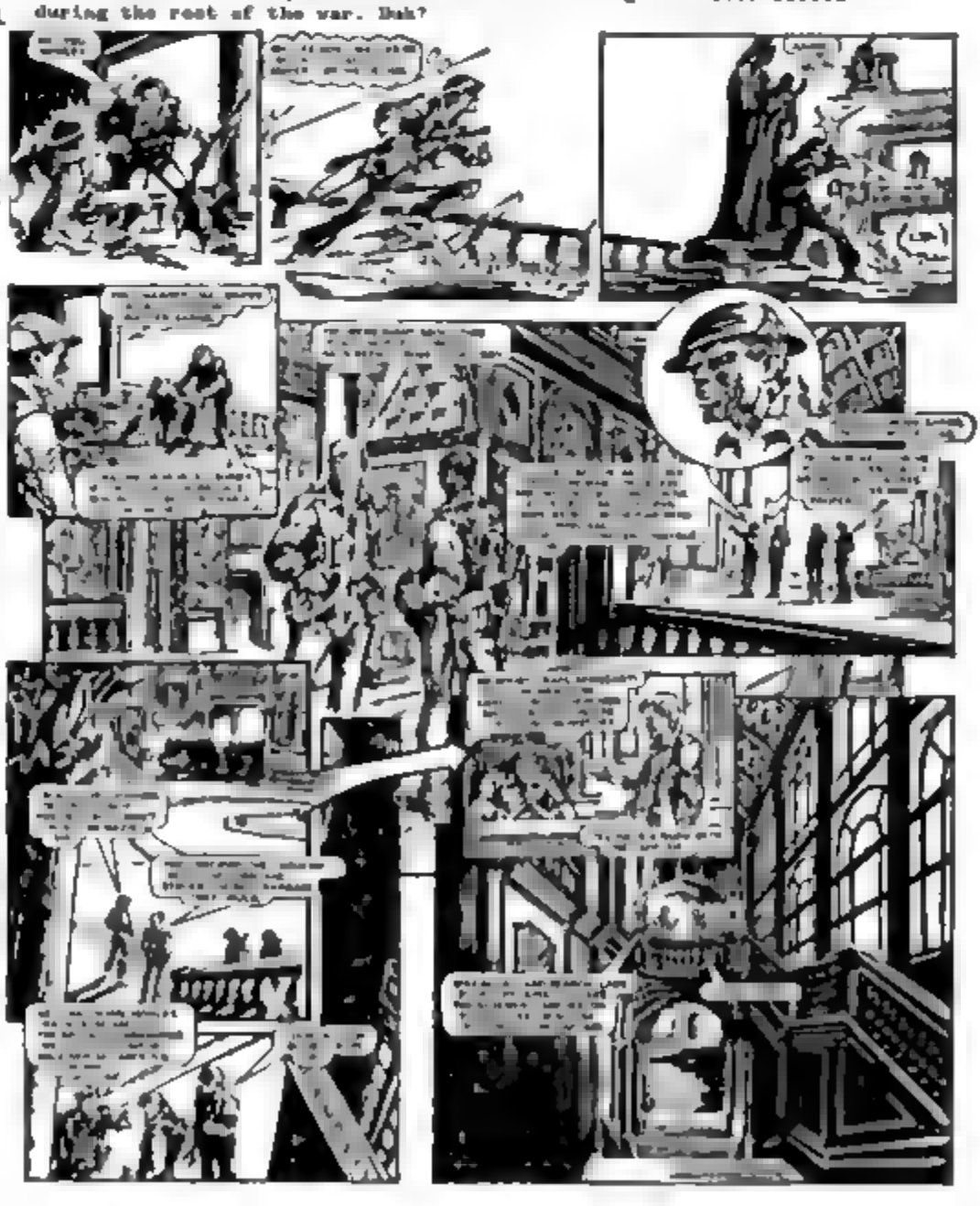
Yes, I am Judge Gibson. Earlier in the Judge cadet story of Judge Giant I'd shown a memorial plaque in the Academy of Justice with the names of Judges Wagner, Gibson and others involved in the production team, and John decided to have them all killed off. So it came to be Gibson's turn and John rubbed my nose in it by having me show Dredd painting over Gibson's name! That's insult to injury after having to draw Dredd shooting me off the roof. Mutie the Pig indeed!

You don't just draw comics. What else do you draw?

Recently Jonathan King approached me to design the image for a new heavy metal band he's organising. The image is based on an ancient British mythology with overtones of revelations. I've given him the original designs and a lot of design ideas, or I should say I've sold them to him for a pittance. He's a mean bugger. I'm not sure that he's going to come back to me for the final design. I think he wants something more than I'm willing to give him for the money he's willing to pay. I don't know if that says more about me or more about him.

Update:The 'Gegmagog' for Jonathon King is finally going to be released as an extended EP sometime soon, as a market tester, to see if the band takes off. They're using Ian's original artwork as opposed to commissioning a proper art job. Ian comments:"Obviously a budget production."

Below "Death Wish" appeared in Valiant. Sergeant Joe Bannon was the sole survivor of a squad of 8 and then tried to get himself killed during the rest of the war. Duh?



Top:"This was commissioned by Bronze records to promote a Motorhead single called 'Mean Machine'. As far as I know it has not been used because of contract hassles as Motor-Head changed record companies. Bronze records still haven't paid me so you can advise people against working for them." Ian did another colour piece for that as well.
Middle A Frazetta spoof for a cover of Kerrang! which represented Molly Hatchet's 'Rebel Yell'.
Bottom:"(This) was for 'XL Design Management' for a Kim Wilde promotion of her 'Second Time' single, to create an image for her video. They decided I'd made her too 'heavy metal' even though I followed their vague brief."

Early last year I did that 'Where is Parsifal' film poster for the Superman/Santa Claus film company. Mike Ploog did the original design and they just wanted it finished off with the pictures of Tony Curtis and people made to look more like them. I tend to get used for that. I note from Ron Moody and Tony Curtis appearing on Breakfast TV that the film is finally being released. They took more than a year to pay me so sod 'em. I almost hope the film gets panned!

I'm quite good at getting likenesses occasionally, such as the time I did the Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger movie adaptation for young Mr. Landau. That was atrociously paid. I was doing that while I was actually doing the very first Judge Dredds and I was producing something like 12 pages a week because it was so poorly paid & his deadline was so ridiculous. As a result the quality of it was way below par

Advertising I generally avoid because of the people involved.

I'm always open to new projects and I try not to limit myself as to what I think I can do. I haven't really started yet.

Do you enjoy these other projects or do you do them because they pay very well?
They don't pay very well at all. I especially enjoy working in colour. That's mostly why I accept the heavy metal stuff. The money is less than IPC rates so bear that in mind when you see them.
What work have you done for Girlschool?
I've got to be careful here because they've just sent me the contract and there's all kinds of horrible clauses in it about copyright and infringement of copyright and all kinds of crap like that. I'm doing a cover for their Running Wild' album that's coming out on Polydor or Phonogram or somesuch American label.
What sort of music do your band play? What are they called? How much success have you had with them?
Personally I call us The Old Hat Band because there never was any performing band as such. We started making plans for having a regular venue in London, but it was just me and a friend writing songs and making demo tapes. I haven't been on stage to play since my time with a aborted band called Love Gun of all things. Precursors of the Sex Pistols I suppose because it was way back in about 1971 or 1972 when we were doing that. I was still moderately young and impressionable. We only did a couple of gigs with The Strawbs and then Brewers Droop before the band threw me out. They went on to back Del Shannon and Bobby Vee and some other touring acts before joining The Fortunes.

They were very influenced by the Stills and Young syndrome. Folky, west coast music. I'm much more of a Blues man. I used to play in clubs in the late 60s, taking my old steel bodied National around. It was a really ancient guitar from the 1930s. It was a beautiful thing. I've still got it knocking around somewhere in a very dogeared state.

I did the demo tapes with my friend Revy. My squaintance Revy. He's too much of a liability to call a friend. He came to me with a couple of chords and a couple of words and said 'write a song.' So I'd write a song, because I like writing songs. So I was feeding off his eagerness to get things done. He d been with quite a few bands and he was keen to leach onto somesone else I suppose to get things going again. Am I being cruel there? I don't know.

It was a passing thing to me. Something to keep me entertained. I suppose Nick Landau blew it all out of proportion in his introduction(of the Robohunter Titan Books) saying I was a keyboard (bass) player whereas, at the time, I had only just bought myself an acoustic bass just to practice around on. I wanted to fill out the sound because I'm really a guitarist.

Way back in the early 60s, when I was 17 (does that tell you how old I am?) I had a folk band, and I used to play guitar and banjo. We used to do things like taking over evensong in a church and playing religious music for them, hillbilly religious music from the Appelation Mountains. I was very much into folk music at that age. That developed into the Blues, and now I'm into a more Rock and Roll thing.

I haven't had any success at all. There were a few record companies who were interested in our demos, but not interested enough in giving us a contract without us being a performing band. That's why we were thinking of

doing that venus thing in London.

Then Reveille got offered a deal to go to Holland on tour with another band. He leapt at that chance and left me rather in the lurch, but he left me with his keyboards as collateral because he owed me a lot of money. So I started to learn to play keyboards, and that's where the comment about me playing both came from. Really, I can't play either one well enough to hold my head up. I'm much more of a Blues guitarist.

I like to sit around and write songs but married life, especially with the kids around, has thrown that very much out the window until I've sorted out a way of producing enough work in a week to support my family and lay back for a couple of days and do what I want to. I don't think I'll ever get the chance to make much more music if that's the case.

Do science fiction films influence you?

No, I'm not influenced by SF films, but I can't pretend to have seen that many. I like Blade Runner a lot, but that could be because it was something like Robo Hunter. I don't think that a film can influence a comic in the way that a comic can influence a film. You can make a film out of a comic, but to try and put film formats into a comic tends to be impossible really, unless you've got lots of space to play with, because space is so precious in the comic format.

Did you invent the Sam Slade costume?

The Sam Slade costume is a development from Jose Ferrer's original attempts. I changed the boots, shirt, gun, Cutie, and modified the cap and jacket. So generally it's become my costume but it started out from a Ferrer original so I can't claim that it was wholly mine. I think it was from John Wagner's original description anyway that Ferrer developed it.

What input did Jose Ferrer have in that first Robo Hunter strip?

That's a complicated question because Robo Hunter was originally written for me by John while I was still on the moon with Joe Dredd, but for some reason Nick Landau, who was then the editor of 2000AD, decided to rush Robo Hunter into production before I had finished on the 4-part Dredd strip, Elvis the killer car. So looking around for a suitable artist who's style would harmonise with mine he picked on Jose, and after 3 episodes realised his mistake. So much for rushing into it!

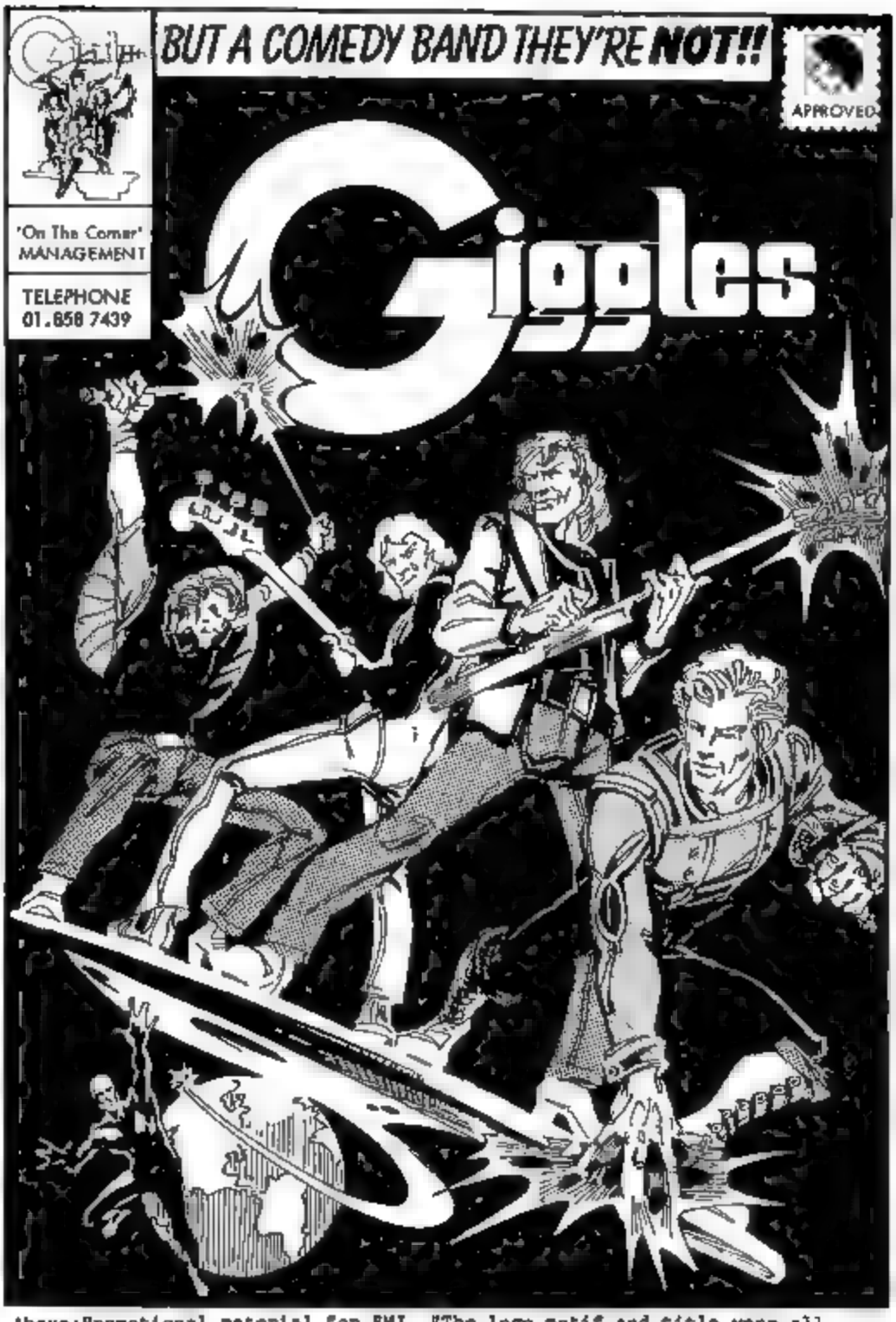
The start was thus delayed while I redraw the first two pages of episode one, and reworked his other pages by redesigning the gun, totally remaking Cutie, and the costume bits, plus a cigar instead of a cigarette. Looking back on it now it was good to have Ferrer's work to use as a springboard for that first murder story. I could have used his help on the God-Droid Saga as well, because I really let that one slide. There were lots of personal reasons for that but no real excuses The God-Droid Saga didn't live up to the expectations that I had created in Verdus.

Has Sam Slade lost most of his Bogart look because your style has changed a lot since you first started the strip?

Well, originally John wanted Sam to be very Bogarty as in 'The Treasure of the Sierra Madre',but I just got fed up of drawing Humpy's haggard face. I wanted to create my own character that was a lot easier to draw, because Bogart has a pretty sloppy looking face, actually. It really doesn't suit the comic format. It hasn't got enough strong lines in it. It's very good for film because it's so haggard, but you need someone like Alberto Breccia to do justice to Bogart's face.

Has John Wagner ever discussed the direction of any of the RoboHunter strips and allowed you to make decisions, or do you just get a script in the post and no questions asked?

I wouldn't presume to tell John his job, although I've had moments when I've disagreed with him. I've usually just gone ahead and changed what I wanted to. Sometimes for the better, like in the factory picture on Verdus. That full-page picture was originally a series of 4 or 5 frames. I thought 1 shot would do it as well, so that's the way I did it. I also did that earlier in the story for the walking Alcatraz droid, which was 5 frames, but I condensed it to 1, with Sam's head inset in the top. At other times I've put extra pictures in,to expand the visuals, and generally between us we've had enough give and take to tell the stories pretty well. Occasionally I used to phone him to discuss something or chat about the story but that was in the days of Verdus, and the God-Droid Saga. Mostly, especially on the God-Droid Saga, I found it confusing to talk to him. I'd get a script that didn't



Above:Promotional material for EMI. "The logo motif and title were all mine in an attempt to upgrade the band - but with a name like 'Giggles who stands a chance?.?!!"

Above A page from the beautiful fairy-tale strip, Grain, by Paul Keatley and Ian Gibson.

match up to the ideas I d got over the phone, so a lot of frustration developed in The Day of the Droids, and as a result the story went off the boil. Later there was little communication and, as a result, I instinctively knew what John wanted a lot better.

I used to be on the phone to him a lot more than I am now. I don't know if that was because I wasn't quite so involved or because I became detatched I don't know

On the occasions that there was a lot of interplay between us I wouldn't ever think that John would take my advice about anything He knows much too much He s just so good that he doesn't need anyone elses advice He might use your ideas to bounce off but he wouldn't take an idea direct from you and use it, because his own are so much better

I remember the '79 Comicon when he first mentioned the God-Droid Saga to me We were sitting over some particularly awful dinner in a restaurant at the Birmingham Metropole when he started mumbling about these droids and this Al Capone Mafia boss droid, and he got me quite excited about it So the first few episodes of that were running under the impetus of good fun and enjoying it, but then for some reason I went off the boil I didn t quite understand what he was getting at a lot of the time I was trying to interpret things in advance from what he told

me and it didn't work. So in some circumstances communication is a stumbling block, because it wasn't complete communication.

The Eagle Comics' Robo Hunter reprinted the 2000AD strips with added colour. Were there any problems in colouring art that had originally been done in black and white, and did you have any problems in resizing the pages?

The main problem in resizing and colouring was the insulting pittance that was paid for the job.

The colouring problems were mostly resolved in the resizing because in the resizing you redraw to compensate for the fact that it is going to be coloured. In other words you wash out a lot of the blacks to give more room for colour, or you strengthen some of the greys. You take out all the zipatones. So it can be a real bloody headache.

Some of the colouring problems were created by Mr Landau editing the colours that I d put in and inserting his own ideas, which I thought worked particularly badly. But that s between me and Nick Landau.

Did you have much colouring experience before the Eagle comic?

I had no previous experience of the colour technique used on the Eagle comic because it bares no real relation to the colours as you apply them. Even from their colour chart. The printing was so bad. Learning to cope with such poor quality colour is an art in itself and it's a skill you can develop, I suppose,after a long series of working on that. You can find out which colours they can print well by ignoring their colour charts and actually seeing the things in evidence in the comic. I think I would have got on a lot better without Nick's interference because he's very anti-bright colours. He didn't want any reds in it anywhere, and I'd put a lot in, so he wanted to take them all out. He took some of them out, and as a result it lost some of it's strength. When we saw it in print the reds really worked well, so slap on the wrist for that boy.

I hadn't done much colour work since the Bionic Woman Annuals and the occasional Judge Dredd for the Annuals. That was in real colour though, not the colour by numbers seperation technique used by Eagle.

When IPC took away Sam's cigar because of their no smoking campaign did you have any trouble trying to introduce the Robo - Stogie?

That problem was in John's lap and I had no say-so. John was just inventive enough to get around that particular piece of stupid IPC legislation.

In one of the Titan books you say that on Day of the Droids John would send you only one weeks script at a time, so that you wouldn't know what was coming next. Now that you're working on Robo-Hunter again, do you still work that way?

Happily I've got all 9 scripts of the present Sam Slade adventure so I've got no excuses about not knowing what comes next and what's important in the story, so hopefully I'll get it right. You will find out when you see it.

Above A pencil sketch of Rodice from Halo Jones.

Have you read much SF?

Yes. I love SF, and my favourite writer is definitely Bobby Heinlein. He's just great He's my number one. I think I've read just about everything he's ever written. Harry Harrison I also like, but I've got a long list of favourites. Ted Sturgeon. Kurt Vonnegut. Larry Niven and Poul Anderson. But lately I've had little time to read, because I ve just been so busy And having a family now takes up a lot of time. I used to be a 2 or 3 books a week man and now I'm lucky if I find the time for 1 a month

Would you like to take a break from SF and draw any other strip on a regular basis?

Halo Jones has almost been like a break from SF. I'm not saying anything against it, it's just that it hasn't been all wham,bam, thank you mam.

SF is my first love but fantasy, drama and fairy stories are things I'd like to do as well. SF is all-encompassing so it can contain all those elements.

When I was still at school I wrote my first full-length novel which was page after page of drivel, although it disappeared somewhere and I never actually got it back from my schoolfriends who were reading it. So God knows what happened to it. That was a detective story

My favourite personal story is the development of Pink into the mammoth novel. That s really Science Fantasy which contains all the above with magical over-tones, tinges of spiritualism, aspects of philosophy, and just about everything except pornography, which I didn't think was worth putting in.

The general rule is that if it's

YOU'RE UNDER AGE!
MY FRIEND SAYS, AS LONG AS THE FELLAS GET THE DRINKS THEY NEVER NOTICE YOU
SHE STARTED AT THIRTEEN.
WHAT'S IT MATTER ? SHE LOOKS EIGHTEEN.

Above:2 of a series of samples for 'Youth Education Programmes.' Ian eventually did the under-age drinking problem booklet and posters. Ian comments "Real boring stuff." Opposite:Mr Wonderful album cover (unused) and a book illustration from Grain before it became a comic strip.

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a good story it's worth doing. Like Robo Hunter. It didn't have to be SF. It was a great story which was well written.

Do you still read comics, and if so, which?

No, I don't read comics. I usually glance through 2000AD to see what's happening and read John's latest Judge Dredd madness, because that's always hilarious. Recently, at the Glasgow Comic Mart I bought a couple of comics and I still haven't read them. I glanced at the artwork and then put them aside. There just aren't enough writers of John's calibre. I'm spoilt. He's really spoilt my appetite for the lesser mortals who produce the American drivel

I've read some of the Warrior stuff. I loved Alan Moore's stuff that he did with Steve Parkhouse; that ridiculous saga of that mad family, The Bojaffries Saga. I love Steve Parkhouse. I think he's a great character and it's nice to see him do humour, which is his real forte. He's a very good humour artist.

Generally I tend to ignore what's going on in the comic media. I suppose I should keep up with all the latest developments, be really pious about it and do my homework, but I don't.

You have worked within different genres and areas. Do you think there exists different levels of competence within each?

Yes, I do

Have you been approached by any of the American companies to do some work?

When DC came over a couple of years ago they interviewed me, offering me a contract, not to do anything specific just a contract to commit me to work for them. I said I was busy doing Sam Slade at the time and not surprisingly they haven't come back. I sent them some of those latest Fink things and Grain as well, so that's probably why I haven't heard from them. I m told they move with glacial speed, in other words inexorably ever onwards, but at such a slow speed it s very hard to notice any difference. Like IPC, it's a massive operation and to really get noticed you've really got to go hammer at the door and make a nuisance of yourself. So if I really wanted to work for DC or anybody like that I'd have to go over and knock on the door and say,'Hello. I'm Ian Gibson. I want to work for you.' I'm quite happy to sit here and if they really want me they'll come and knock on my door. It's not pride. It's laziness.

In America it's the norm to have a penciller and inker to work on a strip, whereas in Britain one guy does the lot, hence having better control of the images Would you consider working with other artists, and if so, who?

Who's going to be offended by this? Nobody at all, I hope.

Very early on I did a couple of brief things with Steve Parkhouse. He was inking my pencils. That was in the amateur days when we were doing the follow-up to Orpheus, before we realised Orpheus was going to collapse. So the strip never got finished. I think Steve had been working with Barry Smith. By the way, there's a silly thing in Titan books that seems to suggest I know Barry Smith or I met him. It's totally erroneous. It's one of Nick Landau's errors. I took the place of Barry Smith within the Orpheus and Aspect setup and I just knew the people who Barry had been working with. He seems to think that I knew Barry from what I said, but I never met the guy.

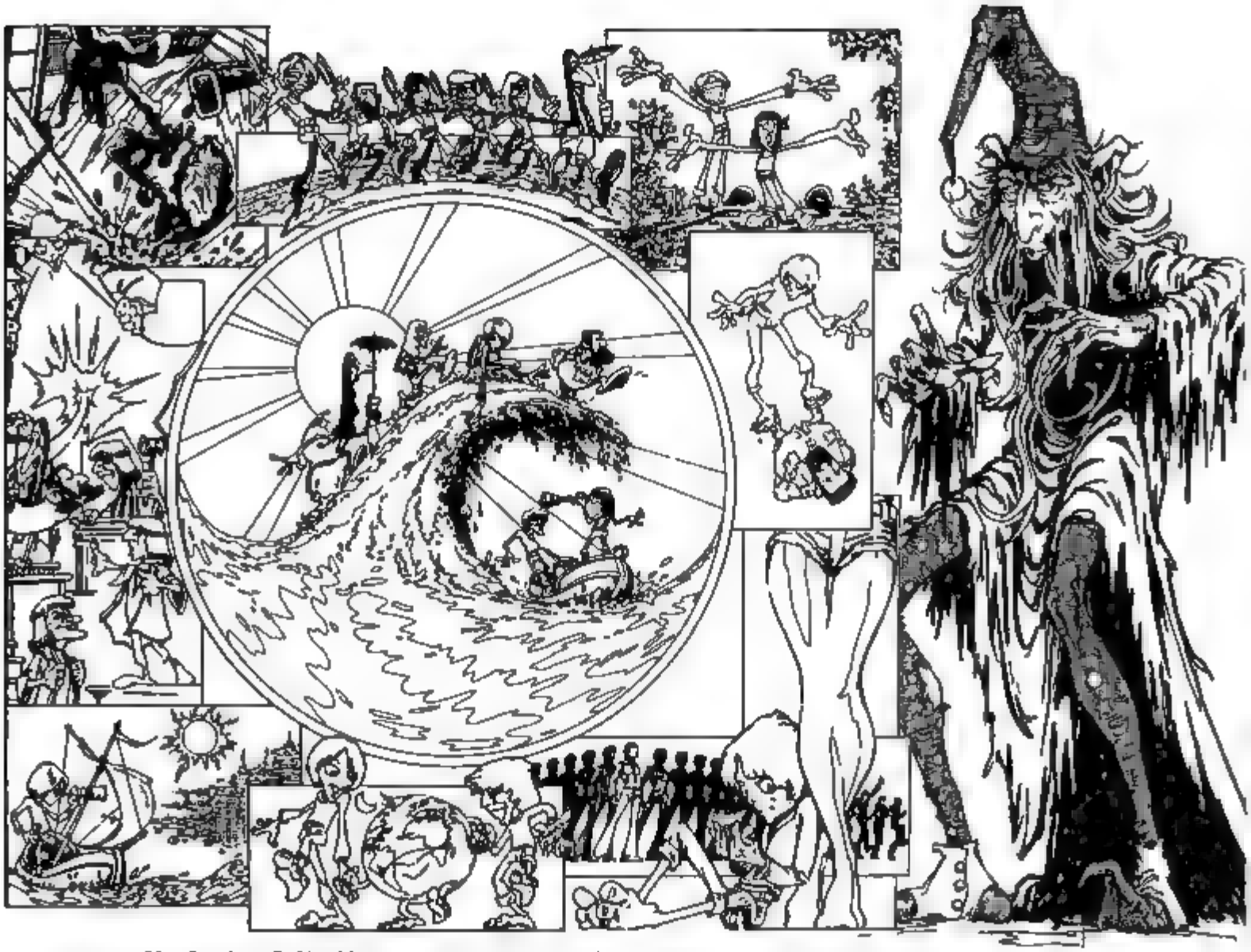
So Steve wanted to take me on as the replacement for Barry in that he had been inking some of Barry's pencils, as far as I know. He wanted me to draw up something for him to ink, but it never got finished. It's probably been thrown away ages and ages ago.

The second time we worked together was for one of my love story booklet things where he inked some of my pencils. I was surprised to see how much his interpretation of my pencils differed from the way I would have done it myself. It was an eye-opener to how vague my pencil marks were and how they could be reinterpreted. Still coherent, but reinterpreted. At the time I didn't like the change. I liked what Steve had done, because I have a great deal of respect for his ability. He s got a great sense of black and white, but he's been in comics for a long time now and he's got a lot of intelligent miles under his belt from working on so many comics at IPC. Editor of Whizzer and Chips and things like that.

I worked with Redondo, inking his pencils on some of the Mind Wars saga for Starlord. He was really pushed for time so he had to produce 2 episodes a week, or something like that. That guy is amazing. Working with Redondo's stuff was an education in itself, because his pencils are so tight that they are just perfect. And you shouldn't make any mistakes inking pencils that tight. They are just wonderful. But I managed to make mistakes, and make it look stupid.

Why did you use the pen-name Emberton when you drew Judge Dredd?

It's a long, sad story. After Day of the Droids I felt I d let myself and my audience down so badly that I needed to refresh and revitalise myself to reinstate my values and to reform myself as an artist. The pen-name is the other side of my family, my Mother's maiden name, and perhaps a salute to the musical side of my heritage, which had actually been the reason for my steep in quality on the art side. I'd been spending 4 days a week writing songs, rehearsing and taping them with a friend, who is insistant on making me famous as a rock and roller. It was a lot of fun but it left me with very little time to fulfill my commitments to IPC. As a result I was rushing the work and my heart wasn't in it. I was O D.ed on sex, drugs and the



sausage roll. So when I finally came to my senses and realised what I'd been through and that I'd been through all that back in the early 70s, I decided to rehabilitate myself via the pseudonyms of Emberton (for Dredd) and Q. Twerk (for Tharg) I don't know if that makes any sense but I was going through some changes then and I signified that by changing the name.

Did you try to get the look of somebody else's Judge Dredd?

My Judge Dredd changed so often. My Judge Dredd under the later stages as Emberton was very much a combination of a spoof and salute to my good friend Mike McMahon. Sadly, Mike has been very ill lately & I m praying that he'll soon be better.

I had the privilege of working with Mike in designing some ideas for an animated movie for Animation City, which hasn't yet seen the light of day or cinema screen.

Mike's a very talented guy and I consider his Dredd to be the real one as opposed to Brian's or Ron's. After all, Mike and I were there in the beginning with Carlos and Turner, in the halycon days of Call-Me-Kenneth, whose come-uppance I had the privilege to render. My style then was very different. I think I was still American influenced then. Then the Moon series I did for Dredd was much more me. Now, going back to it again, I think I've seen the spoof side of it a lot more, as I've been spoofing up with Mike and generally enjoying Dredd.

You change your style for different strips

I enjoy changing my style around. Some strips require a humorous bent and others need some extra drama. The Aranic and Old Lace-like 'House on Runners Walk' as opposed to 'High Society' or 'Stoopy Glanders'. They all need a slightly different treatment and it's good to be able to bend your style to suit them.

Creating the visuals from the word go sounds a bit like an Olympic artistic event that you have to do within a certain time, and I suppose weekly deadlines need that sort of mental athleticism. So for an easy life it's nice to work occasionally on something where at least some of the details are predefined. It can be such a strain with all this designing-for-tomorrow. It gives you a headache after a while, but when it works it is very, very rewarding

You get your artwork back from IPC, but do you get it back from your other work?

No Occasionally I've got stuff back from EMI but that was purely because I was a friend of the manager of the band I was doing the stuff for. So he d keep the work and give it back to me.

I've never got much of my original artwork back. Recently I've started to get my artwork back from Kerrang! I've done a couple of covers for them and they are supposed to be coming back to me.

I ve begun to stipulate that my artwork should be returned, particularly the colour stuff that I've been doing recently. I lost a good piece of work to X L Design studios recently, who refused to return it, but that's what the pop world is like. They live totally in a world of their own. The less said about that the better

IPC is offering to return our artwork to us. As to what I'd do with all those 1000s of pages I don't know. I d need to move house. A lot of it I don't want back anyway. A lot of the stuff I've done is real rubbish, I'm sorry to say, but it is.

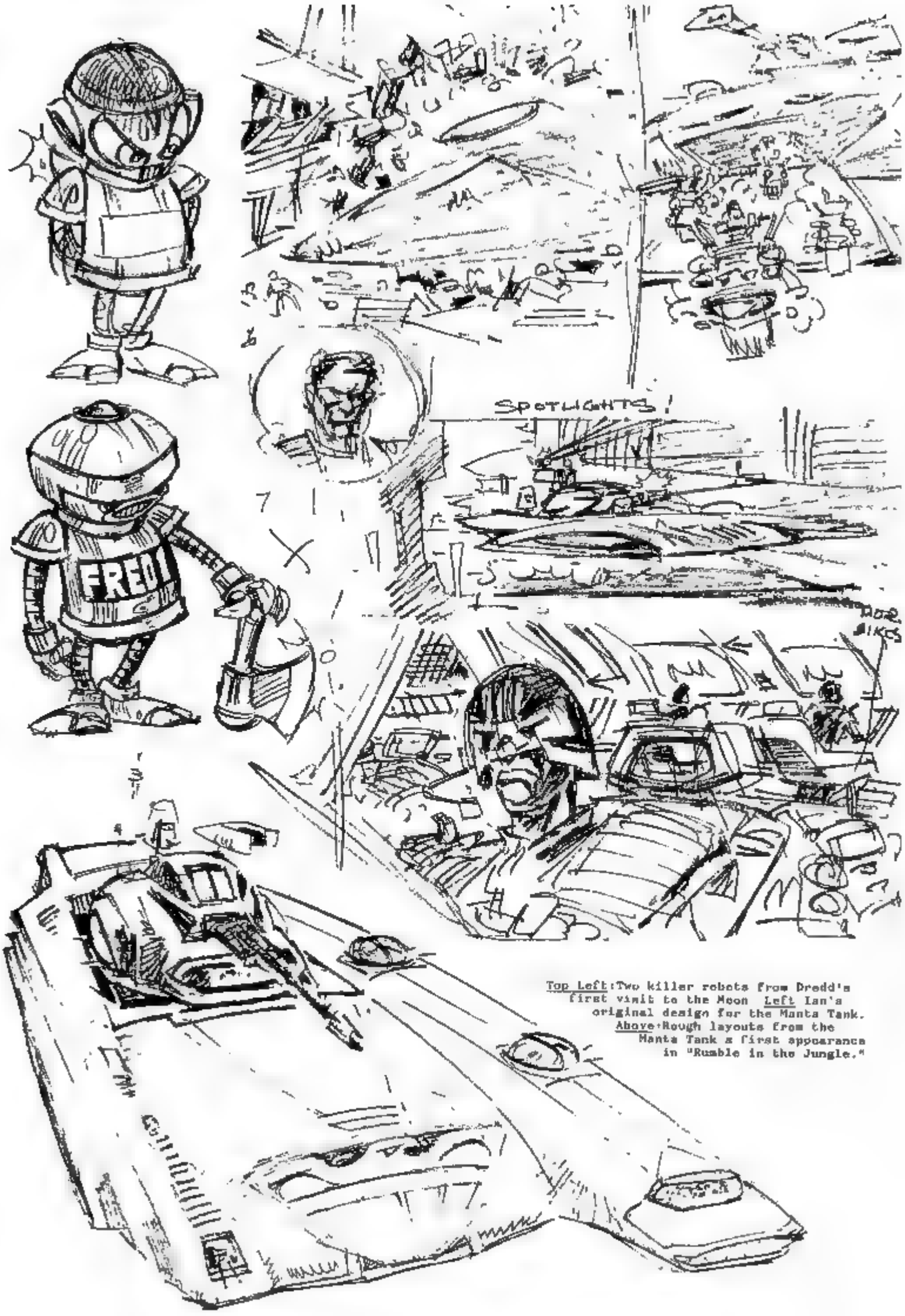
Do you think IPC are returning artwork now because of the constant drift of talent from here to America, where there's more money, and do you think the next thing they'll be forced to do is pay artists and writers to reprint their work?

Well, there's not that much money to be made in America unless you hit it big.

I think IPC are scared they'll lose all the talent they've helped develop to better markets, so they're trying to offer better terms against their normal instincts. It would really take an earthquake under Kings Reach Tower before they paid for reprints though.

Shall I put in some pontificating and preaching now?

The thing to bear in mind when we gumble about IPC is that they're offering us a showcase. All the artists that we rate nowadays like Holland, McMahon, Gibbons and Cam Kennedy have all been able to develop themselves as artists through the auspices of IPC. They've given us a marketplace. They've given us a window to display in. IPC's 2000AD has really been a showcase for a lot of modern artists. So it s a bit nibbling at



Top Left:Two killer robots from Dredd's first visit to the Moon Left Ian's original design for the Manta Tank. Above:Rough layouts from the Manta Tank s first appearance in "Rumble in the Jungle."

the hand that feeds you to suggest that IPC, by right, should do all these things that would be very nice to do.

I think that the problem at IPC is that there is so many people getting back-handers out of the various situations at IPC. That's a political problem that they have to deal with themselves, within their own structure and I don't think they ever will because big businesses like IPC never really know what's going on from head to tail. The brain's too small to cope with the whole body. And so a lot of the profit that could be ploughed back into paying for better artwork, or keeping all the best people working for them instead of letting them slip away, gets gobbled up by the abundance of hanger-oners and dogsbodies. I don't mean the office cleaners because they do more work there than half of the staff there that sit around just twiddling their thumbs. I'm not talking about the editorial staff. I'm talking about all the fiddly little secretaries and the manager of this, and the sub-manager of that, and the guy who makes the tea for the big boss. There are so many people at IPC who don't actually do anything to produce anything. There's a lot of dead wood. I suppose there are all kinds of union reasons why those people can't get kicked out because they are not producing anything worthwhile. Do I sound very Tory there?

I think people ought to justify their own existance, and a lot of people at IPC don't. And that's the reason why all the profits get burnt up, apart from the fact that the rates on that building are verging on the millions. I think it's well over a million just in rates, per annum. You've got to take things like that into account when you look at their profit margins.

So those are the various reasons why we don't get any royalties from all the reprints, because there's a thousand other guys with their hands out within the building saying,'I want a cut of this. I want a cut out of that,' and everyone has to get paid off somewhere.

IPC's a bloody mess actually.

The comics field in Britain is,and always has been, aimed at children. Do you think intelligent scripts and sophisticated art are viable in this climate?

How well does Asterix sell? I remember back in the 70s it seemed to be everywhere and everybody was buying it Goscinny, God bless him, produced scripts of intelligence and sophistication unequalled as far as I'm concerned, and Uderzo complemented them with art to match. Europe is a better market for this quality of work but that doesn t mean that dear old UK is too sterile a market for success in this field. I just feel that it hasn't been exposed to the proper product. It's easy to get sophisticated and clever both in script and art but go over the top and find yourself not communicating anything. It needs someone of the genius of Goscinny to produce an idea to catch the British imagination. I think that's the problem with sophisticated and intelligent stuff...it's not really all that sophisticated and it's not very intelligent. Am I preaching? I'm preaching. I m an old bigot really

I hope you see what I mean about that.

My little neice came around a few days ago and I was looking at one of her kiddies comics. God knows what it was called, but it was a dozen pages of coloured drawings. At first glance you d dismiss it It d got The Magic Roundabout and others in it. I can't remember. I was impressed by the quality of the work. Surprisingly it was a nice eye-opener for me because I had been thinking about this question of yours and it struck me that,within that comic, the seemingly simplistic style had got a great deal of sophistication to it, and a great deal of skill. It was aimed at the children's imagination in such a way that it would be fun for them.

Okay, there is rubbish produced but that's by people who think,'Oh, it s for kids, therefore we can get away with producing rubbish.' There are some people out there who think, Oh, it's for kids, therefore we've got to produce magic.' Once you've produced magic for kids it is magic for everybody. So I don't really agree with the idea of limiting any product to any specific market I think that if it's going to be entertaining it can be entertaining through the whole spectrum. From less than 8 to 80. Everybody should be able to enjoy it if it's good. If it's only mediocre then it'll only appeal to a certain aspect of the market.

Preach, preach, bloody preach I don t know what I'm talking about really.

The British comics market has been declining for many years now. Long running comics are being cancelled. Do you get the feeling within the industry that things are getting worse?

Yes, we are in decline, but I m not sure if it's the product or the marketplace. I tend to think it's the product that's destroying it's own marketplace. I don't have any broad knowledge to pass on any meaningful comment even though I've just been trying. I think the decline has been brought about by misguided attempts to hit the market with new ideas, and sadly the new ideas didn't have any foundation. As a result it created a degree of panic within IPC and they started to pull the shutters down. And once they start the momentum builds up and there's a great deal of inertia involved. So you have to fight against the tide to do anything new, because the tide is ebbing and they're grinding to a halt. There's life there, and I'm sure the market is capable of supporting new ideas if they are good enough. But if IPC and DC Thompson and others flood the marketplace with shit - which is what the Americans have been doing, I'm told,...flooding the marketplace with absolute pap in an attempt to destroy the independents - you're cutting your own throat. So that's why the marketplace is dissolving, because so much shit has been put into it. That's so true of our society in general. You get it within the motor industry, the house hardware industry, and even in house building itself. They throw up ticky-tacky houses. I bloody well live in one. Nobody wants to have them because they are rubbish, but the marketplace creates a demand and absorbs it. Even the pappy comics get absorbed, but that's because there isn't the quality to take their place. Eventually the pappy comics wear thin and the kids think,'I'm wasting money on this, I could buy a crappy Mars bar instead.' So generally all around everyone's losing because nobody's producing a worthwhile product.

Commercial comics aimed at a younger audience have certain limitations attached to them - simple layouts, precise storytelling, words in each panel - do you find you work better with limitation like this enforced?

I think you've made a bit of an over-generalisation there about comics being aimed at the younger audience and the limitations involved. I think it s up to the artist to develop the limitations editorially imposed to his own benefit. If you haven't got limitations you've got nothing to work within and therefore nothing to stretch. It was the same thing I found when I was a foreign artist. So many of the orders had been

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Below:Cover for Kerrang! The bulldog represents the British image bands.

Above:Pencils of Robo Hunter and Hoagy. Opposite:Pencils for the cover of the second Eagle reprint comic of Robo Hunter.

broken down, in fact totally collapsed in on itself, that you had nothing to stretch. Absolutely no direction. All the young artists I was with at the time simply had nowhere to go. So limitations are something that helps you develop and helps you grow. It's something to push against. You've got rules, therefore you can break them, and bend them, and stretch them. Without any rules there's such an amorphous porridge that it leaves you somewhat in limbo. So, unless you re going to impose your own restrictions and your own borders for working within, you're not going to produce your best I think. The limitations make you think around the problems they impose. Does that make sense?

Eagle, TV21, Countdown and TV Action were comics which gave artists the chance to render their art in full colour. Do you think that given the opportunity again there remains enough talented artists to take up such a challenge, or have they stuck with black and white for too long?

I know the kind of feeling you're getting at because when I was asked to do some colour stuff for the Annuals, I was thinking,'Well, crumbs, I haven't worked in colour for ages.' I think it probably showed. For a while my colour was terrible. I think the things like the Bionic Woman Annuals that allowed the use of full-colour painting, not just coloured-in black and white, were, for me, a place to experiment with colour. And, hopefully, it wasn't just me who benefitted from this format. I imagine there were other artists who found out something similiar for their development of colour sense, and got them out of the black and white trap, if you like. The 2000AD and Judge Dredd Annuals give artists a good chance to experiment and develop their colour. I don't know if they use this opportunity, but it is there. I think you'd be surprised how good a product could be produced. Just look at Mike McMahon's work He uses colour like a magician

Do you have any deadline trouble or do you work very quickly?

This is getting in the way of my deadlines, because it must have been more than half an hour since I made a mark.

My problems with deadlines are usually caused by laziness or greed. The greed by taking on too much by not being able to say no to people. People come along with trivial, or important, things to do and I think,'That ll be fun. I can squeeze that in if I really try.' But then I don't really try and everything slides and gets later.

In reality I can work very quickly. Last night I worked from .0 pm to 1.45 am and I drew 3¾, nearly 4, pages. Some of it needs tidying up but all the basic elements are there with some nice portraits of Sam I'm in a bit of a doze now because I had to get up at 7 to run my son to school. So sometimes, when I stay up too late, I'm wiped out the next day and I actually lose some of the time I thought I was gaining.

I've been known to work very quickly. IPC used me as an overnight artist for emergency use at one time. When they first produced Action 1 there was a Rollerball-type story about these loonies on motorbikes done by some Italian artist. The main artist had only done 3 pages and it was coming up to deadline time. They needed the other 2 pages in a hell of a hurry and they couldn't get them from Italy fast enough. So I went away and produced the last 2 pages of that story overnight.

I've been known to sit at the drawing board and pencil 6 pages straight without a break. Something like an 18 or 20 hour spell. I finished the Strontium Dog I did for Star-Lord in a busy weekend, including the colour spread, which I did myself as opposed to someone else slotting the colour on. At the same time I was working on my regular Sam Slade story. So sometimes I can really pull the stops out and produce something at an amazing rate. At other times I just meander along, such as the time I was doing a lot of music

What advice would you give artists who want to start in the comics industry?

'Know your business' Study carefully how your favourite artists produce the effects you admire, and, at first, copy them to develop your skills. Then practice telling stories without any words. That's very important. Don't rely on the words. Make sure your pictures tell the story regardless of what the words say, so that you can tell two stories at the same time. I think Alan Moore likes to do that sort of thing. Then practice telling the story in pictures with expressive gestures and movements, in various moods, by various layouts, and how you light the thing. Layouts have a great effect on the way the story moves, the speed the eye moves I always tell people that the angle you look at things changes the speed you read because I have this silly theory that it takes the brain time to adjust from one angle to another. So if you want to slow the speed of the story down to create a passage of time then you look at things from a high angle, then a low angle, and then a different angle, then a close up, then a distance shot. The more changes you give then the more adjusting they have to do. As long as you don't make it incoherent, you find that the time span spreads out. Whereas if you want things to go really fast you give very similiar angles, or a staggered close-up, or a zoom sequence.So a lot of how you tell a story is the way you lay it out.

Learn what works best by telling stories in different

ways. Take a simple scene and try and look at it from a horrific point of view, a romantic point of view, a sad point of view, a dramatic point of view, a happy point of view. All with the same figures, but change the way you light it and the way the figures are posed. Once you can do that then you are making progress.

Draw from life whenever you can. In pubs, cafes, streets and at home so that you know how people look and how they act People are the key to storytelling in comics. If you can't draw people, forget it!

Make sure you're good enough then send samples of your work to everybody you can think of, and don't be too proud to work on things that are mundane because you'll learn lots in the process. I've even drawn Larry the Lamb stories (very badly - for shame!)

Now you can go away and draw comics.

Do you approach layout from an overall point of view (e.g. Bellamy) or from a story within a frame point of view (e.g. Ditko)?

I approach layout from the turnover point of view. Will the layout make a good cliffhanger? Will it make a nice natural flow to the next page? That's what I think about first when I break down a story into the pagination of the various frames. Then I see I've got 5 to 12 panels to cram onto the page. I try to lay it out so that it doesn't look cluttered, because that's really hard work for the eye to read. Then you lay it out in a way, if possible, that enhances the speed that the story flows at.

Very often I'll organise my layouts before I even think of what the images are going to be. And then I ll discipline myself to create the image within the shape of the pre-ordained layout, which can give me headaches at times. Other times I think of an image which means the layout has to be a certain way, so it depends.

What do you think are the strengths of comic strips, compared with TV, films, radio and novels?

Cheapness. If you want a cast of thousands you don't pay the artist a fee per head drawn, so there's no extra budget. The same goes for crowd scenes, special effects, aliens, costumes, and hardware It all comes at the same price: CHEAP. It's incredibly cheap

How did you get the job on Animation City and what is it about?

I can't really remember how Mike and I got the job. We worked together for a few months swapping ideas and images and competing to some extent to define the best versions of each character It was a lot of fun. It's frustrating to think that it probably died stillborn

I don't know if I ought to give away what it was about because I don't know if it's going to come back to life. It was a pretty bizarre story, which spanned the ages, and was quite humorous.

I hope Animation City is still going because I know they were struggling to find advertising work and to get there projects underway. They did that beautiful whale story that was on TV a couple of Christmases ago. I'm not going to tell you much about that just in case they're still working on it

I've never seen an interview with you before Is this the first?

This is almost my first interview because Nick Landau tried to interview me for the Robo Hunter books but I waffled so much, as you've noticed, that he ran out of tape and time. So he asked me to write the introductions to Books 3 and 4. So, yes, this is the real first interview.

How did you come to be drawing Halo Jones?

Halo Jones is the result of a meeting with Alan Moore at one of Nick Landau's post-signing parties. I was talking to Steve McManus (Tharg) about the idea of putting more women into the paper, and at the same idea I liked the idea of working with Alan on the strip. So I spent some time talking over the idea with Alan of working up a girl's story and eventually he came back with a pretty well-formed synopsis. I spent a weekend with Alan and we talked up a story while I designed the main characters there and then on the spot. Together we plotted the first few episodes in rough outline. The idea of the shopping expedition being a major event was probably mine because I saw the Hoop contained too much information to be dismissed in a couple of episodes. It was Alan s original plan to get Halo off into space in about episode 3. So maybe the slowness of the first book was my fault.

We didn't talk so much about Book 2. We spoke but there was nowhere near the amount of discussion that was involved in Book 1. We did so much development of Halo s character and what she was going to be like that I think we're still surviving on that. It's very good to get together with a writer and churn ideas over.

Some people found the first Book hard to follow. What do you think of it?

The Ballard of Halo Jones is a very different kind of story to the usual 2000AD kind of strip. Alan wasn't interested in talking down to the reader through explanatory dialogue, & lots of thought balloons to explain what's happening. And, as I said to him, life doesn't offer any explanations as we live it, so let's make the story that kind of realistic. That's hard work for the reader, but if the story's good enough the reader gets involved and accepts those limitations. I find stories that sit down and explain everything to you a bit wanting. I think Halo Jones is a much more mature strip.

Do you approach layout and panel flow in a different way for your romantic comics, and if so were any of these techniques utilised in Halo Jones?

No, not really. I don't think there's any difference between the layout concepts for love or horror because at certain times you have to do the same juggling thing with the speeds and the flow of reading , and the way you want the pages to turn. There might, somewhere, be a typical Gibson layout although I don't always stretch myself to the limit as far as adventurous

Above: Character sketch of Brinna from Halo Jones.

layouts go, because I'm always aware that editors have a very low estimation of the intelligence of their readers. So usually, if you find a strip boring in its layout it's because an editor has stomped down hard on his artist to make sure that every 7 year old can follow it with his thumb IPC have even issued memos and letters to the artists to say that any difficulties produced by unintelligible layouts will affect the artist's future with the comics. Necessavvy. This sort of shit gets the editors paranoid and the artists frustrated because some dummy upstairs in the management, who doesn't give a toss about comics anyway, has decided that the readers are at least as backward as he is and so please make it simple enough for him to understand. So generally IPC are out to insult the readers

If you have a look at the very first Halo Jones spread, that got so badly coloured by I-know-not-who, you probably can't imagine how much thought and deliberation went into that layout, partly because the colour destroys it. I asked for monochrome frames in subtle shades to create a delicate descent from space to the pod and Halo's room. What did I get? It wasn't even kiddy colour. It was terrible. Sometimes they break your heart. No wonder the quality slips on occasion

At the end of Halo Jones Book 2 the artstyle seemed to change again. Did you change your style because Halo was on an ice planet and you wanted to change the 'look'?

I'm always fiddling about, trying to get a new texture & a new feel. I don't alway have the time to do all the experimenting I want to. That was just a bit of experimentation to see if I could create an icy feel. I think in the originals I did, but it didn't print very well. There was a lot of razor work in there that I did, where I did the images in black and razored off areas to give it the glistening quality of ice.

Halo hasn't actually found her style yet. Maybe in Book 3, which is hopefully coming out later this year. Then I'll knuckle down and develop a style.

Also I must admit that I was criminal, in that my lines were so fine on some of the detail in that, that they disappeared and the printing just wasn't up to the quality of the art. So bits of people disappeared out of the drawings. That's my fault for not understanding how limiting the IPC printing is.

How did the Halo Jones centre-spread for this years 2000AD Special come about?

The spread was to be a present for the guys who organised the Glasgow Comics Mart. The guy at the local art shop wanted to do an air-brush demonstration for the art college so that he could sell airbrushes, compressors and all sorts of things. He got me to go along and give a demonstration, so I knocked it up overnight, took it along, showed them, and then put the finishing touches on at the college.

Then I showed it to IPC and they said,'Oh, can we have that?' So they put it in the Sci-Fi Special, which I was very flattered by, because they actually paid me instead of me just giving it away free.

Looking at some of your Halo Jones layout drawings prompts me to ask do you always work out costumes & fashions before starting a new strip or do you sometimes make them up as you go along?

Both really Halo has needed some designing done to help develop the future clothes I wanted. Not the same styles as the Mega-City throngs with bulky robes and pads galore, but something more considered and more of a cultural mix. I wanted to throw in some of my ideas about the way the various cultures Chinese,Indian,African, will affect the way we dress a lot more in the Future. I m sure that the racial balance, and the power race will turn around drastically within the next 100s of years. Because we're talking in such a big time-span here the world will go topsy turvy It's one of my themes that we're going to become part of Afropia, or something like that. There's going to be black dominance in great tracts of Europe, I think, and possibly in America as well. These are just my ideas about the way costume ought to be. Naturally I can t draw what I think the world will be like in Halo's time because it would be unintelligible to us, and I don't think Alan has projected himself far enough through the changes that would have undergone, to cope with the artwork I would like to produce there. And IPC couldn t handle it at all. It just wouldn't get printed. It'd get edited like recently they put a towel around

Right:A pencil sketch of Halo Jones.
Bottom:One of the Drummers. These 'Glumbies' nod in unison all the time

Mare Dumoir because I drew her from the back without any clothes on, and there was a big bare bum sticking out at us. So poor old Robin Smith had to drape this towel really grossly around her arms. It was horrible Oh dear. Never mind. IPC, God bless them.

I've had to be quite ordinary in many areas where I d like to be experimental. We don't have the comics code over here like in the States, but we have IPC's dullheadedness, so you choose which is worse. Costumes usually get developed into specifics as the characters emerge. They tend to change from frame to frame with me. I tend to forget from week to week what they are wearing, so I have to design something new based on my vague recollections.

My sister is a textile designer and she has a lot to do with fashion. She came to me one time talking about the way holograms work. In the future we'll be wearing some sort of device on our belts that can project an aura around us so that we can wear whatever we rpogram into our little boxes. So we can just change fashions at the touch of a button. We can actually walk around naked within this aura, and presumably it would also contain the right kind of heat and cooling controls to cope with the temperature changes we're undergoing. Technologically we could go that advanced, but how do you explain that in comics? It's very difficult to get that across. I remember trying to once in an experimental project I was doing with Pat Mills. I don't think I showed it, I just told Pat that I was going to use it if I got the chance. So somebody would adjust their dial and they'd change costume as the frame changed. Nice idea, I don't think anyone'd ever understand it.

Is the future of Halo Jones assured, and how many books will the whole thing encompass?

Alan (Moore) was planning a series of 7 books with 10 episodes each when we first talked about it but that depends on the audience reaction. I know that he's decided to do the next one (Book 3) as 15 episodes because I was talking to Steve (McManus) when I said I would like to have 2 books at once, because by the time I'd done the 10 episodes of one I was only just getting warmed up so it'd be nice to flow straight onto the next one. Well, Alan didn't want to do that so what he's done is just extended the length of the books to 15 episodes. This might mess up his scheme because he was originally doing it so that each book would go out as a Titan book. So he was writing for the reprint, greedy boy,hoping for the royalties.

What have you planned for the future?

I don't have any great plans for the future except to work on my abilities until I get good. I've allowed myself to slip too often in the past. I'd like to get good at the job and I'd like to expand, to explore other avenues. I like the colour work I've been doing recently. I had the fun of doing a Dredd story in full colour in airbrush, and I also did the airbrush cover for the 2000AD Summer Special. It's an extension of the arm now. It's fun to use.

Thanks for giving me the chance to waffle and let you know a bit about me.

Thank you, Ian.

After the initial shock of spending £10 on photocopies of all the material you sent, I had a good time sorting through it all. It's a pity so little of it is printed in this issue. I'll endeavour to use as much as possible in future issues For instance, I'll use some more of the Halo Jones pencils to illustrate an article I've been promised about The Ballad of Halo Jones

Ian has offered us a 12 page Grain strip to print in Ark sometime in the future. Needless to say I've accepted, so as soon as it's scripted, lettered and dropped through my letterbox I'll print it. Probably in 2 or 3 installments.

My thanks, again, to Ian for the cover, the mountains of art, and his kind co-operation.●

John Jackson found yet another corner, this time with Mike McMahon in it. Mike, artist on Judge Dredd, among others, talked for a couple of minutes about his involvment with Animation City

A small animation company, Animation City, wanted to do a feature-length SF film and they put an initial package together. The initial finance was provided by a British Film Foundation sort of thing that backs British films. If Animation City can find a producer for the film, with big money for them to make it, then they'd pay back the money to this foundation.

How did you and Ian get involved?

They'd seen our work in 2000AD and they got in touch with both of us at the same time through IPC

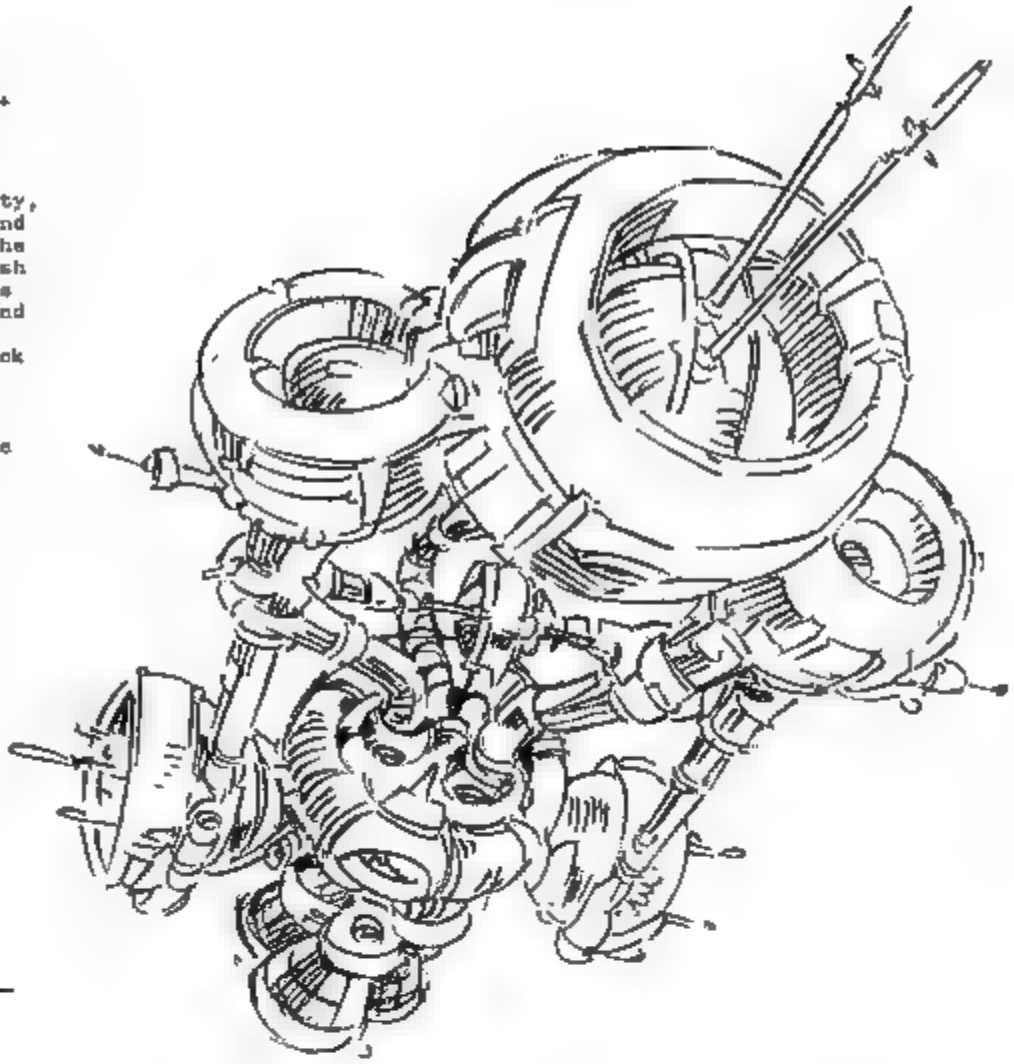
We both did designs and the film never got anywhere in the end So all the material that was done was copy-righted by the people that put up the initial finance. It belongs to them now

The people at Animation City had written a script, almost a finished draft and we did character sketches Then I did 5 paintings to show scenes from the film. Then they tried to get people to produce it, and a few were interested, but nothing happened.

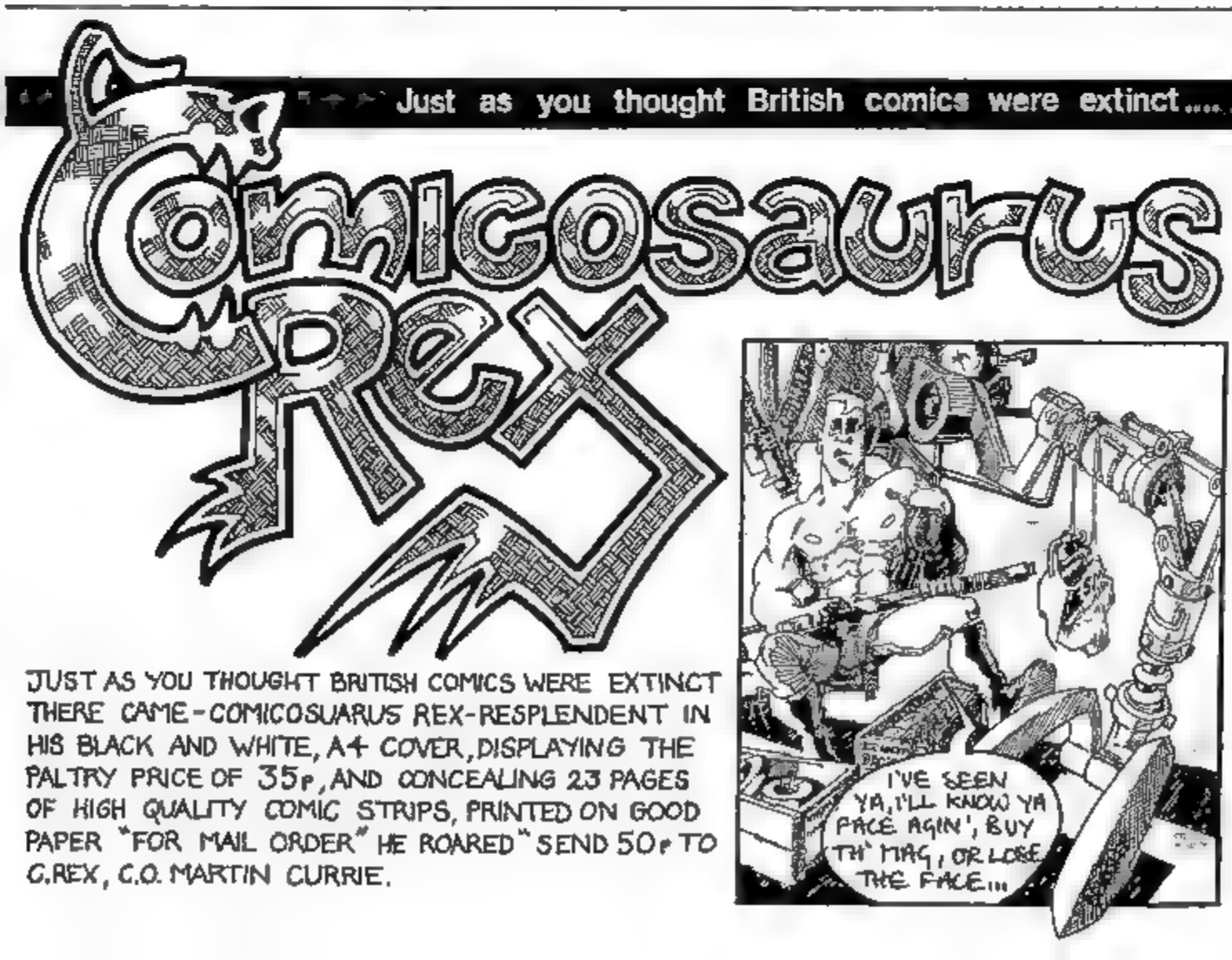
It would have been good.

What was it about?

It was called 'Dark Grail . It started off with a scene of the Ancient Romans and the Holy Grail The Holy Grail is then sent to the future and the film is about what happens to it there and how the Apocalypse is avoided at the last minute. There's a lot more to it than that. It s a bit of fun ●



Right This ship was one of Ian's designs for the animated movie,'Dark Grail '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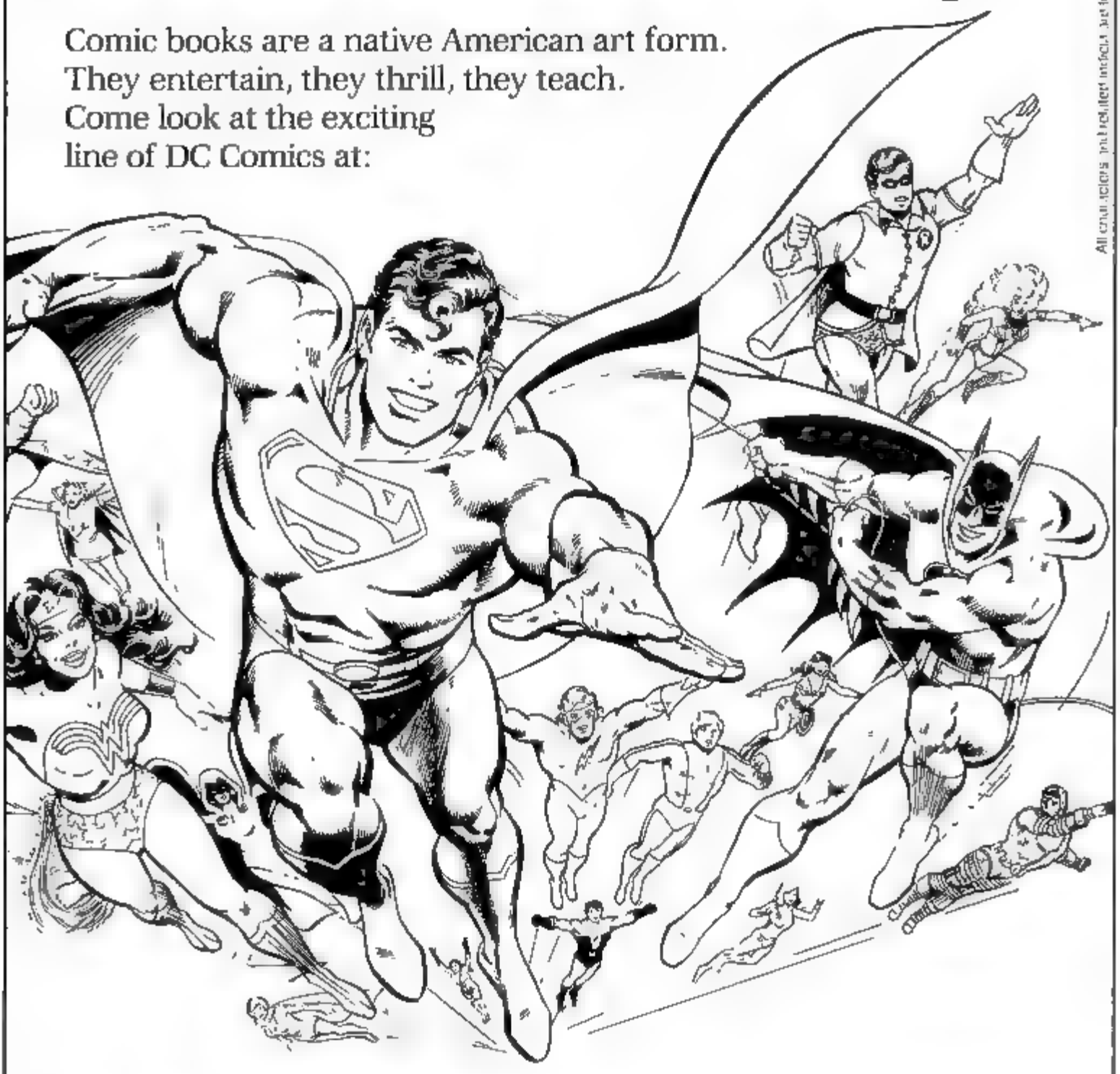

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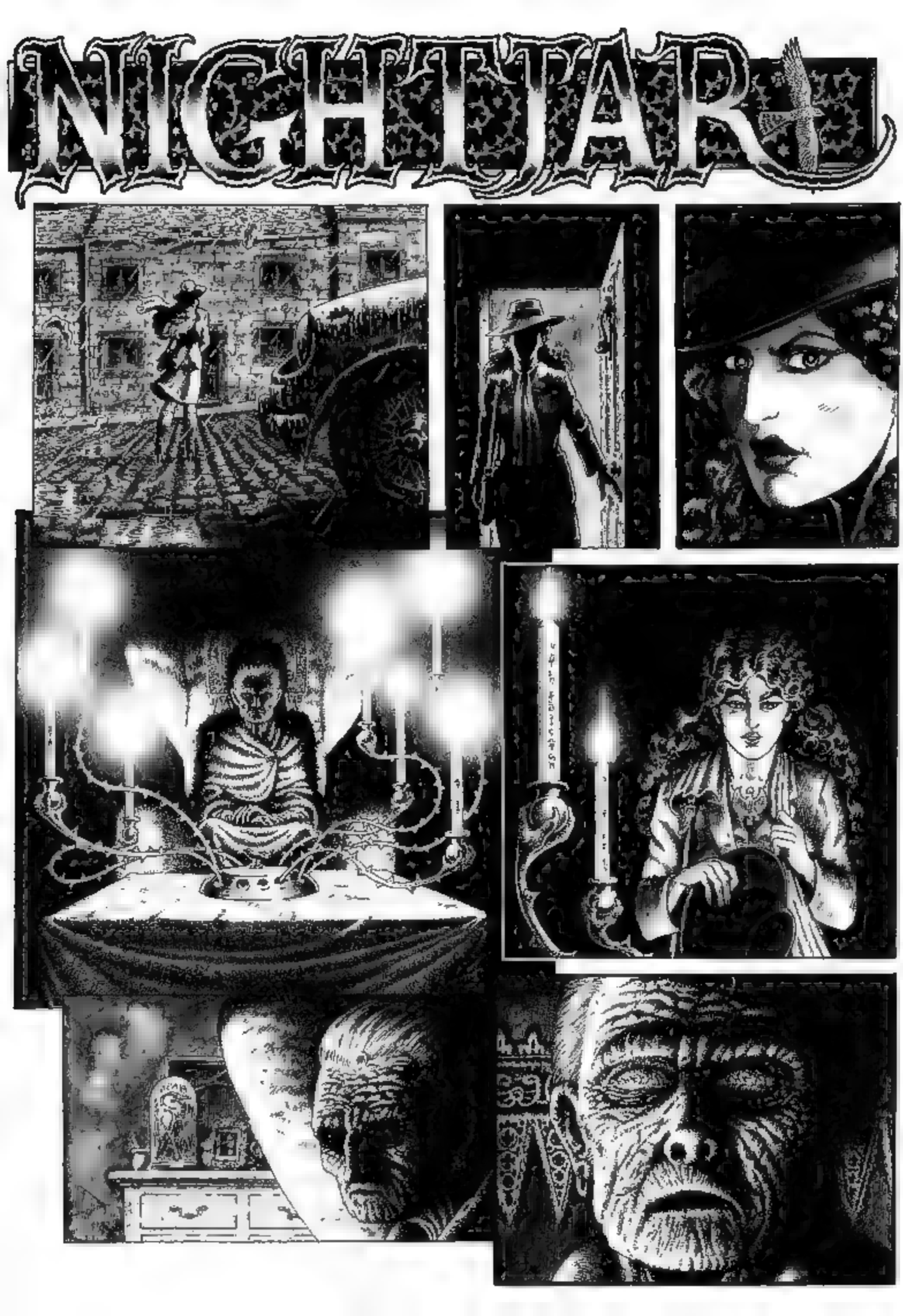
NIGHTJAR

Nightjar is a collaboration between writer Alan Moore and artist Bryan Talbot that looks into the world of The Empire Of The Birds, a whole society that exists, unknown, behind everyday reality The central character, a sorceress called Mirrigan Demdyke (named after 'Old Mother Demdike' - one of the Pendle witches circa 1700s), is known as Nightjar to the secret society.

Alan wanted to treat this kind of Dr. Strange territory in a completely different way, which means no pyrotechnics but lots of atmosphere and weird situations, conjuring up a misty world of magic. This scenario is perfect for Bryan's unique style, harking back to the gritty, Hogarth-inspired streets of "The Adventures of Luther Arkwright". Bryan chose a variety of techniques to convey Alan a script including fine line,water colour wash, and a touch of airbrush work As you can see from the page opposite, Bryan has used these instruments to fine effect.

Alan and Bryan wanted the character of Mirrigan Demdyke to look striking, but not like a Hollywood star or a Marvel comic heroine. So they decided upon Jane Morris (the pre-Raphaelite face that launched a thousand paintings) as a model.

So far Bryan has drawn 3 or 4 pages of the first chapter (the first story has 6 to 8 chapters) and the page he has generously supplied is the 2nd page of the first chapter. Originally Nightjar was to appear in Warrior, but because Dez Skinn and Alan fell out that was then out of the question. Alan says that sooner or later Nightjar will fit the bill for one of the books that he has been asked to write, and they'll finish it then.

That's about all the information I have on this to-be-completed strip and I hope it has been of interest. Bryan is at present finishing off the latest Nemesis book, and then he'll be working on his first Judge Dredd strip,written by Alan Grant. Alan is writing everything under the Sun. My thanks to Bryan for supplying the artwork and information. ●

FANZINES

No doubt everyone thinks I do nothing else but put together Arken Sword all day every day It may seem like that but in fact I also publish Short Fuse (with Graham Cousins and John Jackson I add hastily.) Short Fuse is an ANNUAL publication and Number 1 is out at this very moment. It contains strips and illustrations by the famous and the not-so-famous. The line-up this year is :Paul Alexander; John Bolton; Graham Cousins; Alan Davis, Phil Elliott; Bamboo Georgiou; Dan Green; Mike Higgs; John Jackson; Mark Lockett; Paul Neary ; Tim Pearce; Ed Pinsent; Mark Roche; John Romita Jr ; Gilbert Shelton, William Simpson, Robin Smith; Law Stringer; Steve Way; John Welding; Steve Yeowell, and to finish it off, a brilliant cover by Bryan Talbot. 48 A5 pages, card cover, for 70p in the shops. 80p by post from me. ($2 to the USA.)

Magnetic Fields 1. 30p plus postage from Andrew Korn,
20 A4 pages

Included in this issue is an interview with Brett Ewins, which is quite interesting, and it includes some of Brett's pencils from Judge Dredd. Strange Days, which contains work by Brett, Pete Milligan and Brendan McCarthy, was quite good and it's nice to see that it's splitting up into 2 books. The colouring is mostly by Steve Whitaker, who actually paints some of the pages when they are in pencil form. Then the pages are inked, so that the black lines are not trapped under the colour. The lack of strong blacks seems, to me,to be one of the main colouring problems around at the moment.

Also in Magnetic Fields are interviews with Brian Bolland and Joe Medjuck(Associate Producer of Ghostbusters would you believe!!) as well as a strip and news. Andrew says that MF only has a print run of 20 which is ridiculous. It isn't the best fanzine I've ever seen, but the contents alone would guarantee a 100 print run at least.

Don't underestimate yourself, Andrew.

Wish 1. 70p plus postage from Kevin O'Donnell,
48 A5 pages

This has quite a good line-up, and virtually everyone involved comes from Manchester, whatever that means. The strips that impress are Berlin by Bob Moulder and The Chase by Kev O Donnell and Chris Williams. Berlin is a moving account of Jews in Berlin and it has a haunting feel to it. It has an illusive feel, and one that will stay with you for some while. The art is loose for the people, allowing you to put your own emotions into it, while the buildings and streets are solid. You are there in Berlin. No doubt about it.

The other good strip is only good for the art. Chris has a very nice realistic style that he adapts very well to all the strips I've seen him draw He tells a story nicely too, without any fuss The script is pretty inane and pointless Why can't people write scripts with some point to them instead of a simple progression of events? An interesting progression of events is okay, but that isn't present in The Chase.

The rest of the issue has Jim Fortey, Ed Pinsent, Rob Sharp, Mark Lockett, John Jackson and Graham Cousins. Some is okay but I think it could have been better These guys can produce good strips. I mean really good strips. But not in Wish 1. Maybe in number 2 things will improve

This is worth getting, because the promise of better things to come is there, and they can't bring out the second issue if they don't sell enough of the first one. Okay?

Amalgam 13. 50p(+17p stamp) from Robin Kirby,

48 A5 pages

A quick mention This is a zine you dip into For news, strips, letters, reviews and a couple of interviews with some Marvel UK people Interesting ●

FRANK MILLER'S RONIN

by Fiona Jerome

As I'm sitting here, wondering how to approach a general article on the subject of Frank Miller's Rönin, my mind keeps returning to the fact that the comic reader generally, and its specific audience in particular, have been victims of a double set of manipulations. First there was the colossal hyping of the book before it appeared. It had always been presented as "Frank Miller's Rönin", and that's the way you have to think of it - the terms have become inseparable. Not only was the reader bombarded with posters and adverts, he was presented with posters consisting of nothing more than other comic creator's opinions of the work; there were even some detailing what happened in each issue, which, of course, you had to avoid looking at. This not only created a tension of temptation, but also developed the idea that Rönin was a work of art, not a simple comicbook. Knowing what came next was not important - appreciating how it came about became of paramount importance. There was a constant invitation to analyse visual and verbal techniques, rather than concentrate on a simple progression of events. This, in turn, moved the reader away from dwelling on those little idiosyncrasies of storytelling, the lines that didn't quite make sense if you were considering it as a fantasy story

The advertising drove expectations to an inordinately high level, & inevitably some people were disappointed. The first issue, with its setting in feudal Japan, seemed classically simple, but also fairly shallow. Demons & magic swords; ancient curses; all familiar stuff. With hindsight the reader who reached book six (and who noticed that the elevation in status went as far as calling plain old issues "books"?) can look back and see how the eventual ending developed right from that first issue. This,in itself shows that the reader was constantly manipulated by the writer/artist, led to certain conclusions, later thrown back again. After the first few pages it's easy to be convinced that the whole story will be set in Japan. The conflict between Lord Ozaki & the demon Agat is quickly established. From the moment our nameless hero becomes the Rönin it is possible to develop a conception of the story as a chronicle of the Rönin's wandering culminating in his confrontation & destruction of the demon. Once this event leaps upon us, then we can alter our perception of the story. Because we are used to accepting the fantastic, as soon as Billy appears we conclude that he is somehow informed of the story, not that he has made it up. The physical manifestation of the demon reinforces this belief. Way back at page 13 we are told that Billy was "Just dreaming. Day-dreaming", but reject this because there is no immediate connection between the events set in historical Japan & those set in the yet-unspecified future. The breaks between settings are placed so as to divide each of the storyline possibilities.

The reader is progressively duped into believing Billy's fantasy to be the reality of the comicbook For one thing he can see the fantasy world become real in the counter-pointing of Casey & the Rönin s outlooks, that is what they literally see. The reader accepts this as a device representing their differences in conception when it should be taken as a literal representation of the way in which Billy forces his vision onto other people.

So in the end we accept that it was all a fantasy initiated by Virgo in order to suppress Billy's latent telekinetic powers while releasing said energy in useable bursts to augment her plan of taking over the Earth with biocircuitry. Except that after Billy's final outburst, destroying God knows how much of the complex? city? continent? we are presented with the Rönin stepping out of the mists towards Casey. Can we accept this as a happy ending? Can we logically assume that in the confusion Billy saved both himself & Casey, & can continue his fantasy now that he has been purged by the ritual of Seppuku? Is it a bit of metaphorical wishful thinking, or, & it is a big or, is this simply a sign to say that all the possibilities you conceived of were equally as true as the one I seem to have concluded? If you accept the Virgo/fantasy explanation it then starts to call into question the format of many of the earlier sequences. To tell his story more fully Miller has to show you more than one person's point of view. Now if the fantasy centres around Billy being the Rönin,fulfilling his desires to be strong, agile, handsome, & have Casey, then surely he would only fantasise his own adventures, with the minimum of scenes concerning others - only enough to support his own narrative.But the reader sees very much more than Billy, it seems - and experiences events which seem unlikely to be the result of a sheltered person's mind. It seems obvious

to me that no simple conclusion can be drawn, & that none needs to be drawn. The internal evidence for the probable conclusion is as frail, once you remove the sequences where we are talked through it by the McKennas, as the evidence for concluding that the whole thing, Virgo & her less than believable plot included, is a fantasy on an even grander scale developed by the young Billy Challas from a TV programme (the RÐain looks like the actor, you'll find it if you look at the reaction of the Sawa corporation official to the pitched battle between the RÐain & the demonstration war robots) in order to escape life as a "talking pillow". It could be that the killing of Bart is, in fact, the same as the end explosion, or that the whole fantasy is a reaction to the aforementioned killing, rationalising, glorifying & making valuable the power that Billy has just discovered, & which has condemned him to kill.

RÐain should never be considered as simple as it may seem; the whole project worked hard to keep the reader good & confused. The art itself, often changing style & using narrative tricks, showed a continuation of that dramatic unreality first begun in the impossible lighting & angles of Daredevil. However it's obvious that Miller's drawing style developed a long way between the two; indeed it can be seen changing as RÐain moves along. I remember on reading the first issue the patches of rough cross-hatching set over eachother to build up tone really impressed me. Set against the more controlled,firmer, more rounded lines used for scenes within Aquarius, the different artistic approach to each type of scene really came out, this contrast freshened by the red/brown/purple colouring of the RÐain's world, and the cool green/blue shades used for Aquarius, where the jades and the limes made green reflect the unnatural plasticity of the world rather than its similiarity to nature. By issue two things were already altering - the more open brutality of the slum New York came over in the increasing harshness of the line with less and less controlled cross-hatching, and more scribbled effects often moving outside the borders. However, it is between issues 2 & 3 that the most marked changes occur, and it has been these that have been most frequently attacked by the book's critics. Certainly both the art and the storyline are not consistant - it is by no means certain that Miller knew how his story would end as he began it, and consequently the style of drawing keeps changing to produce different nuances of atmosphere. By issue 3 the general style becomes more unified, with faces & backgrounds drawn with a similiar degree of detail in all environments. Hatching becomes more careful, & the role of outlining is once more reinforced. Many of the more sketchy panels, as in the opening sequence of taming the horse, seem to be based on dividing the panels into rough areas with tentative, delicate pen lines, and then filling the areas in with shading using varying degrees of density to suggest movement. This acts in marked contrast to the later use of largely black pages with very simple, solidly drawn figures & faces, as in the underground sequences. The Giresque flat faces of the earlier issues with their controlled application of tight lines are similiarly replaced with the scratchier, smaller lines used to give a sense of a more all-over tone, where colour is used to give depth. The art here is as full of tricks as the story is trinky. Large white & black are used to great effect,as is the device of repeated,regular panels. Miller shows off numerous different styles, from the solid greys of the re-run film, to the black & white, highly designed sequences of the exploding motorbikes, to the linear, borderless sequence of the gang executions, enhanced by the misty colouring; and all this in a single issue. Because these tricks by Miller - long panels, tiny panels, repeats, wide white spaces & figures exploding out of their boxes - many of which we've seen before, are so widely spread they all seem fresh. Equally because his art is made up of so very many narrative tricks these differing devices all seem part of a single style, when in fact they show differing inclinations.

To stay with issue 3 for a moment, since it seems to be the one on which the story pivots, I'd like to examine the spread on pages 26 & 27 in detail because here, I think, Miller shows how much he's learnt when producing comics, and how well he's in control of storytelling, setting conventions off against innovations. Much of the pages are made up of long, regular panels, with one, single doublesized box. The events - the slow after-sex cigarette, the excitement of Virgo finding the RÐain, Casey rushing off, her husband following her with a string of dialogue about being needed in the lab, their final embrace, Casey walking away from him into increasing darkness - are regulated by this device. Instead of a sequence of panels used to slow or speed up action, this sequence is used to regulate the selection of events, and place weight on them all equally. The peak of action, the announcement "I've found the RÐain!" is further weighted by the double panel coming immediately afterwards showing McKenna quietly continuing to smoke while his wife makes plans with the computer. Except for the total blackness of the last panel, the rest of the page is covered in tone, giving it a grey,grainy, dull feel reflecting the emotions of the characters. The nuance of emotion is as delicate as the linework. The repeated panel becomes less of a device to shift time, and more of a motif, a framework that no longer limits the artist to small pictures. Particularly interesting is the re-application of an old Steranko idea - dividing the picture between several frames. A tension is created between the over-all look of the pages, which switch between 1,2,3 or 5 panel pictures, and the reading sequence which compels us to see one panel at a time, on its own. Here Miller experiments with presenting a familiar use of the technique, as in the third to fifth panels which split up McKenna's face, and the five panels below this where the figures themselves are seperated by a panel in which neither of them appear, although it is part of the all-over picture. If you look at it as part of one picture, divided, then it assumes one meaning,whereas if you consider it as one in a sequence of panels,its import is considerably altered.

Rightly enough, the importance of Lynn Varley's colouring has frequently been pointed out; for once colour has a strong part in telling the story rather than just filling in the spaces. I feel that it was the initial colouring, more than anything else, that suggested the European influence in Miller's work that so many people talked about. The sheen and the colour certainly gave it a European look, but even from the first issue (perhaps mostly from the first issue) it seemed clear to me that Japanese art was responsible for most of the changes in Miller's art, especially the less caricatured faces & more-violently inked backgrounds. Also the panel compositions in the early issues, with their action often relegated to the background, and objects cut away from the edges of the pictures, reminded me of Japanese prints. Another particular sign, unlike most of the others which became blended & lost in the organic unfolding of Miller's style, to be seen in both first & last issues is the way in which clothing is drawn. Either it is one with the body, or it is a huge flapping mass, often unrelated to the body it covers, & seemingly to have a life of its own, reflecting the traditional Japanese interest in pattern & surface. However, to list likely influences is only a partial achievement, since it is clear as the series progresses that these outward stimuli are amalgamated with styles of depiction that develop internally, reactions to these sources blending with more reactions to produce a range of differing styles which possess a unity that keeps the look of the comic consistant enough to remain convincing, yet allows the artist/writer to use disparate narrative elements that would stretch a single style too far.

Every time I return to RÐain for a reread I find some new strand to follow, some new scene to question, spot a new trick or two. It is a treasure trove of artistic vocabulary from which a modern critical vocabulary for comics may surely be developed. Certainly there is a lot of space in the work where Miller indulges in unnecessary pictures or the creation of unnecessary characters. In the first 3 issues, which divide between the adventures of the RÐain in a strange world with a cast of bizarre figures, and the development of the Aquarius storyline, there is a sense of indecision, of a jumpy narrative moving from one good, but not completely compatable, idea to another. By the end of the 3rd issue the two are pushed together into a single storyline without distractions, perhaps too direct a storyline for some people's taste.

It is arguable whether RÐain is the 'greatest thing since sliced bread', or even the greatest thing comics have produced this decade. You can say it's visually & narratively confusing. I'll tell you that's good thing. It's debatable to say that RÐain is great; however it's much easier to conclude that it's interesting; RÐain overviews could fill books, not simply by number but by length, which is an accolade in itself. Perhaps the most important thing to say about it is that you can keep going back to it & get more and more out; it's a facile statement to make, but it's also a facile attitude to think that you've learnt all you can from the book and that you know what RÐain is all about.●

Send to: Paul Duncan.

Chris Law.

Thanx very much for Ark 13/14. In the past I have sometimes thought that Ark was rather lightweight in comparison with its immediate competitors (namely Fantasy Advertiser & Chain Reaction). I think that this issue finally lays that ghost to rest. Overall I find it difficult to fault the zine, the only area where I possibly missed out was in not being familiar with much of Phil Elliott's work. ((The interview with Phil was really a way of making people more aware of Phil and his work. Hopefully the checklist, which Phil kindly compiled for me, will help people track down his stuff from Fast Fiction.

Send an SAE for their latest list. I usually send a list with subber's mailings.))

Your exhortions to get stripzines are all very well but I do think that some zine eds make life difficult for themselves by making their zines too expensive when Fantastic Four is 30p and American Flagg! is 90p, anything that costs more is going to have difficulty selling. That said I do think that some stripzines are well worth supporting. Off the top of my head I'd say that Burn & Myra are my favourites. There is also the question of how do we judge fan output, by professional or fan standards. The criterion I like to use is entertainment value & value for money. This means that some of the 'deeply meaningful','progressive' strips that I've come across don't do that much for me.

Dark Star Heroes is a good example of a zine which has lost its way. £1 a shot means that as far as I'm concerned it's gotta be good for that money. However some of the material it's contained hasn't really been all that great. Fair enough considering it is amateur work but I think Rob had a better idea when he was publishing lots of small zines instead of one big one. On Food For Thought I thought it was a good zine (if indeed you class it as a zine). A minor point : I would have preferred contributors to have concentrated on making a good contribution rather than trying to get a message across. I'm just being picky though I can see why this message idea was used. ((If a stripzine is good then I think that it should be supported. However there are not enough people who take any notice of stripzines, good or bad, in the first place and that is really why I was trying to get people to try a few. Even good stripzines find it hard to survive.))

The Chaykin interview was excellent. I think I'll have to go back and reread the old Flaggs. I also think that Luther is out of place in the strip. Howard says he's there for comic relief but I've always felt the funnier bits were those involving Raul. For a 'serious' strip I'd say there was a lot of humour, but the Luther character just doesn't work that well.

The Brian Bolland biography was excellent - one of the most impressive articles I've seen in a fanzine. Excellent cover by the way.

You're going to find it difficult to better this. ((You're telling me!!))

Donald Thompson.

Another excellent issue of Ark - enjoyable cover to cover and an interesting Chaykin interview that was the <u>low</u> point of the issue in some respects, which shows how good the rest of the zine was. Certainly his work deserves careful reading - I'd missed that double-speak mentioned. The interview just confirmed the impression he made at the convention - an interesting, informative, remarkably un-arrogant guy. ((I don't know when the news is breaking but Flagg! is being put on hold because Bill Willingham has decided not to do it. I think that's AF! 29. I'm probably wrong though & someone is winding me up. Howards new comic is called Time Squared,with a little 2 after the Time. This type-writer can't do that so I'm stuck.))

The Phil Elliott interview was probably the most personally rewarding one I've come across in Ark, having never encountered either him or Doc Chaos before. The tapes made, um, interesting?, reading & I'll be looking out for more of his work. ((I think I should mention that Doc Chaos writer Dave Thorpe supplied the Doc Chaos interview. If you want to see more Doc Chaos then get the latest Dark Star Heroes for a mini-story. Phil has promised me a short story in a couple of issues time, and also a Gimbley strip appears in Short Fuse 2, which is out now.))

Martin Crookall's article on 'V For Vendetta' was well done although the flaws he points to I don't think are flaws. Certainly I don't think that Adam Susan is in any medical way insane. Taking as first principle the need for an orderly society as he does, given the lack of any strong self-discipline in the face of the breakdown of normal society,as seen in Warrior 3 & 5, some kind of imposed external order was and is obviously necessary. What would have made 'V' even more interesting would have been to make Susan a Nazi rather than a fascist, taking the Marxist dictatorship of the proletariat/supremacy of the working class, and limiting it strictly to Britain - after all with most of the rest of the world gone, internationalism would seem a useless, sick, irrelerence. Nor do the resettlement camps in my view flaw Moore's arguments. They're simply another expression of the interests of the state coming before everything else; in this case the solution of the racial purity problem coincides with the growth of medical knowledge that might prove of value to those who 'deserve' to benefit from it. Overall, however, I agreed with both the tone and conclusions of the article. Assuming the Head were removed, would anyone be better off or would we just see a rerun of 1988-98 with the 'softies' being replaced by the <u>real</u> hard men, and does V really care? 1986, if Warrior/D.C. get around to finishing things off, promises to be very interesting.

Moore's interview convinces me that he is a freak. A thoughtful, educated,caring person who actually enjoys writing comics. I don't know how he got here or how long he'll be around, so make the most of him while we can. His opinion of the Moral Majority is somewhat higher than mine - another sign of how nice a person he is. His summation of Lovecraft's genius as a horror writer is something he's successfully managed to transfer to his own work; my only complaint is that he's doing too good a job of it - my stomach was in better shape before I started reading Swamp Thing. However I'm not going to let a little thing like that stop my reading it.

The Willoughby story rounded off an excellent issue; I hope we'll be seeing more of him in the future. ((I had to include some mention of Willoughby otherwise John Jackson would have made my life a misery. Did you know he did 3 versions of the same Albert strip on the back page?))

Martin Crookall.

Arkensword 13/14.

You were right, it is an excellent issue. Don't be modest, you say that I said that in print.((Aw,shucks.)) There's an excellent range of subjects covered, from straight article to interview, with a range of styles and opinions. Frankly it's an exhausting job trying to take it all in at once. Can't you upgrade the print like the Comic Journal...?(Collapse of editor at thought of bills.)((I wish I could afford type-setting, but I paid a lot of money for <u>this</u> type-writer and I plan to have it for a few more years yet. Unless, of course, Ark hits it big in America.))

The Bolland interview was highlighted by his cover. I'll be very contentious; Bolland is an excellent artist, with an immediately distinctive style, that

SWAMP THING & ABBY
IN:
"IS THAT A BRANCH DOWN THERE OR ARE YOU JUST PLEASED TO SEE ME?"
OH, SWAMPY HONEY! I NEVER, LIKE, NOTICED BEFORE... YOU'VE GOT A BEAUTY SPOT! WOW!
DOES SHE REALLY LOVE ME OR IS SHE JUST TRYING TO GET INTO MY PLANTS?
FISONS
MIKE MATTHEWS '85 JULY 10th

masters both detail & action & emotion. What's contentious about that you ask? ((What's contentious about that?)) Not a lot, but he doesn't seem to have half the moral sense of Howard Chaykin.

Not for nothing does that cover pitch Dredd against two of the Flagg! girls. Belland is noted probably for 2 things: Dredd and sexy women, which are disparate ideas. Brian can draw Flagg! girls as well as Howard can but he can't make them escape from the impressions of their appearances and come to life with their own aspirations as Mr. Chaykin can.

Brian Bolland, sexist. It's all over that portfolio he's done for those French people. Clean, stark, elegant art but where are the adult sensibilities behind a plate of a naked woman in sunglasses running along a WW1 trench alongside a bunch of soldiers?

Contrast these simplistic and frankly immature sexual conceptions to the work of Howard Chaykin in American Flagg! (Nice interview too - I saw Chaykin at Birmingham last year, where everything he said impressed as being good sense.) Yes, sex and suspenders are flashed about pretty freely but in an unsensationalised manner that doesn't call attention to itself as being seperate from the story (Hey! Look! Hot stuff, wow!) and which isn't allowed to obscure the other aspects of character of any of the females. That quality isn't present in Bolland's work and, growing increasingly sensitive to juvenile approaches to sex in my old age (30 next birthday) it tends to mar my enjoyment of an artist or writer.

"Cutting" finally to "comments", your response to my thoughts on age grading was rather more practical. It's an ideal solution but it requires a hell of a lot of people to agree with it and the important ones (the DC and Marvel hierarchies) won't play ball for exactly the reasons you state. Your final paragraph seems to me to double back onto the argument about ratings again by pointing out that if DC do what us fans want (an adult comic as cheap as the rest) then it's a dangerous thing in the midst of the juvenalia. Back to the "distinguishing marks" concept again.

I suspect your thoughts about the big two producing adult comics at a cheap price to be a little disingenuous. Yes, they've done it with Swamp Thing but I'm pound to say that the only other title I've seen come out of the giants that approached an adult audience (i.e. non-superhero) was Thriller, which at $ 1.25 stood up for comparison to First etc. on their levels not DC's. That was the prestige package at work, but that flopped.

If I can plagiarise Gary Groth a moment, I'm bound to say that, with very few exceptions, the strong-minded writer perceptions have no home at the big 2 simply because there is a stanardising pressure, even unconsciously, upon artists and writers. Yes, it is far less so at DC, but the majority of their product, and almost all of the top end of their sales range, is, on most objective levels, interchangeable with Marvel. It's better but it doesn't differ in any significant way.

Like it or not, the number of us who want something more is strictly limited. There aren't enough of us & there won't be for years and years to justify DC giving us our comic. Cerebus sells 10,000 a month. Name me a mainstream comic that would still be printed if its sales were as much as 5 times that. And don't tell me that colour & a 50% cut in the cover price would make up that difference. ((I think that falls flat when you consider that Swamp Thing does shift a lot of copies. Enough to make it a viable proposition anyway. I see the point that low print runs to direct sales allows a wider range of material, so to combat this low readership a campaign to educate the masses would seem in order. So that in the future the adults don't think that comics are for kids, but for everyone. A situation like this exists in Europe. Also I see that Eclipse have aimed their adverts towards people who don't normally buy comics, which is a step in the right direction.))

Thanks for the letters. Please keep them coming and I'll enlarge the letters section if you do. Last issue I mentioned Martin Skidmore's project to send aid to Ethiopia via a comic. Martin has given me a few names and the following are contributing: Will Eisner (a reprint of the Spirit story,'Heat');Dave Sim (4 pages of Cerebus);Mike Gilbert (4 pages); Gilbert & Jaime Hernandez (5 or 6 pages); Jim Starlin (1 page); Mike Baron/John Ridgway (3 or 4 pages);Pat Mills/Kev O'Neill/Bryan Talbot (1 or 2 strips,Nemesis and maybe ABC Warriors); John Wagner/Dave Gibbons/others (Judge Dredd,4 pages); Alan Moore story(artist to be found, maybe David Lloyd); Gene & Dan Day (Gene's story and Dan's art, 6 page silent strip); Alan Booth/John Stokes; a Delano/Alan Davis Captain Britain story is unconfirmed; all finished off with a Brian Bolland cover. Fan Aid North is a con to be held at Leeds on Nov. 2nd. British Tele-Fantasy is the theme, and it's in aid of Ethiopia. Guests:Dennis Spooner, Louise Jameson, Brian Clemens, David Lloyd,Joanna Lumley.

See you all in a couple of months.●

ALBERT THE MOUSE.
HELLO AGAIN FOLKS, TODAY WE GET TO TALK TO SAM SLADE, THE ROBO HUNTER!!
HELLO MOUSE
IT SURE FEELS GOOD TO BE BACK IN 2000AD AGAIN. TELL ME, WHAT STRIP TOOK UP MY PAGES WHILE I WAS GONE?
ER, YOU MEAN YOU'VE NOT SEEN HALO JONES SAM?
NO, WHAT'S A HALO JONES?
1985.
HALO JONES IS A STRIP ABOUT A GIRL SAM, IT'S VERY GOOD!
HUMPH! RUBBISH! I BET IT'S NOT A PATCH ON MY STUFF!
I HAD THE GREAT JOHN WAGNER WRITING MY STRIP MOUSE! BEAT THAT!
WELL HALO JONES IS WRITTEN BY ALAN MOORE SAM, HES AS GOOD AS JOHN WAGNER
HMM...
BUT I BET THEY NEVER HAD ANYONE AS GOOD AS MY ARTIST TO DRAW THIS HALO JONES DRIVEL!! I HAVE IAN GIBSON Y'KNOW!
ER, SAM, I THINK YOU'D BETTER TAKE A LOOK AT THE HALO JONES CREDITS BOX IN THIS BACK ISSUE.
EH?
GIBSON!!!
I'M COMING FOR YA! YOU DAMN TRAITOR!!